

RACIAL FRAMING AND THE MULTIRACIAL MOVEMENT

A Thesis

by

TODD CHRISTOPHER COUCH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

May 2011

Major Subject: Sociology

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Joe R. Feagin
Committee Members,	Sarah N. Gatson
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ABSTRACT

Racial Framing and the Multiracial Movement.

(May 2011)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Joe R. Feagin

In the 1990s, multiracial advocacy organizations emerged as a national movement. The primary purpose of this movement was to obtain recognition of multiracial identity by the U.S. government. Though possessing a common goal, the organizations within the movement advocated for multiracialism through different racial frames. Using extended case methodology, this study seeks to identify the racial frames utilized by the multiracial movement. Through in-depth interviews with founders and presidents, current and past, of multiracial advocacy organizations, I extend the current literature on racial framing.

After critical analysis of my interviews, I identify the presence of the traditional white racist frame as well as a racial counter-frame. Reviewing the elements of both frameworks, I discuss how the use of these frames affects the struggle for racial justice in the United States. Finally, using Bell's principle of interest convergence, I conclude with an examination of how the utilization of the traditional white racist frame by the multiracial movement and the interest of whites in maintaining social domination resulted in the "mark all that apply" decision by the Office and Management and Budget.

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NOMENCLATURE

AMEA	Association of MultiEthnic Americans
APUN	A Place for Us National
MASC	Multiracial Americans of Southern California
MATA	Mark All that Apply
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On Saturday morning, June 13th, 1992, in the sleepy affluent town of Chevy Chase, Maryland, over two hundred interracial families gathered at the National 4H Center for what has been considered a historic event. The mass of mixed-race families had arrived in Chevy Chase to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *Loving v. Virginia*, the Supreme Court decision which ruled that the state of Virginia's anti-miscegenation statutes prohibiting interracial marriage violated "both the equal protection and due process clauses of the 14th Amendment." Dubbed "the *Loving* Conference," this meeting of mixed-race individuals and interracial families was the unveiling of a national multiracial movement (Daniel 2002; Williams 2008).

The Multiracial Movement

The American multiracial movement has been broadly defined as the emergence of community organizations, campus groups, magazines, newsletters, academic research and writing, university courses, and political activism created by mixed-race individuals and members of interracial families to voice their experiences, opinions, issues and interests (Nakashima 1996). The theory behind this movement is that the experience of being racially mixed has enough common themes to make people of mixed-race a meaningful reference group (Weisman 1996). To facilitate a cohesive multiracial group identity, those within the movement have organized multiracial picnics, festivals, camping trips, "game days," and conferences in which both multiracial individuals and

This thesis follows the style of *American Sociological Review*.

interracial families are able to forge relationships with one another (DaCosta 2007). It is argued, through these various activities, “They [multiracials] learn they have a place in a larger community of multiracial people by observing a diversity of multiracial families and benefit by gaining support through social interaction.”¹ Despite its broad array of activities, the multiracial movement is typically only recognized for its political activism in the 1990s for a “multiracial” classification on the U.S. census.

Throughout the 1990s, members of the multiracial movement petitioned the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for the addition of a “multiracial” option on all federal forms. According to multiracial advocates, “multiracial classification is an important means by which parents can lay claim to their children and through which children might signal their affiliation with and relation to their parents” (DaCosta 2003). Supporting this claim, Susan Graham, co-founder of Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), argues:

Being forced to choose only one race forces us to deny one of our parents. It also requires us to do something illegal, since we are defining ourselves as something we are not. Multiracial people should have the option of recognizing all of their heritage. "Multiracial" is important so that children have an identity, a correct terminology for who they are.²

According to Hernandez (2003), the “symmetrical identity demand” of multiracial advocates such as Graham is “an appeal for all the racial aspects of a child to be acknowledged in that child’s public assertion of racial identity.” In response to pressure from multiracial advocates as well as other demographic changes, beginning in June

¹ Multiracial Association of Southern California, <http://www.mascsite.org/programs/elementary-parent-project-epp/teen-mentorship-project-tmp/playgroup/>.

² Project RACE, <http://www.projectrace.com/aboutprojectrace/>

1994, federal officers began a comprehensive review process to determine what if any changes would be made to the 2000 census.

The Federal Review, MATA, and the Multiracial Response

In March 1994, the OMB established the Interagency Committee for the Review of Racial and Ethnic Standards (ICRRES), a committee comprised of representatives from over thirty government agencies responsible for submitting the final recommendations for changes to the U. S. census to the OMB. After reviewing the recommendations of the ICRRES, in August 1995, the OMB issued a *Federal Register* notice to provide an interim report on the review process. After reviewing the testimony of ninety-four witnesses and nearly eight hundred letters, the OMB indicated that many of these comments proposed allowing individuals who identified with more than one race to “check all that apply” instead of a stand-alone “multiracial” classification (Daniel 2002; Spencer 1999; Williams 2008). Two years later, on October 28, 1997, the OMB decided to use a “mark all that apply” (MATA) racial classification system allowing for the selection of multiple racial categories beginning with the 2000 census. Under this system, individuals could select multiple choices from the existing racial classifications. Individuals within the multiracial movement received the OMB’s “MATA” decision with mixed emotions.

Prior to the OMB’s decision, on June 7, 1997, members of the multiracial movement met for the Third Multiracial Leadership Summit in Oakland, California to discuss, among other things, their chances of actually having a stand-alone “multiracial” category added to the census. In light of the OMB’s 1995 *Federal Register*, many within

the movement recognized their slim chances at establishing a “multiracial” category and decided a “multiple check off” format would be the most likely change to the census (Daniel 2002). Therefore, when the OMB made its announcement of MATA in October, multiracial advocates were not surprised. Responding to the MATA decision, “multiracial” advocate James Landreth, Jr. stated:

The OMB announced their recommendations on the multiracial category yesterday. As was predicted by Project RACE and others in the multiracial movement, "mark one or more" was adopted. To quote Susan Graham of Project RACE, "As we predicted, the "Mark one or more" format has been adopted. It is a bittersweet victory for us. Multiracial children and adults will have the ability, for the first time in the history of this country, to check as many of their races as apply, but they are still invisible to the health care system.³

Within Graham’s statement, as quoted by Landreth, there is a clear expression of the movement’s two positions on MATA. The majority of multiracial advocates saw the MATA decision as an acceptable compromise between the movement and State (DaCosta 2007; Daniel 2002). However, there were organizations that saw the MATA decision as not going far enough to fully recognize multiracial people as a *sui generis* racial group (Daniel 2002; Sexton 2008; Spencer 1999; 2003; Williams 2008). However, among those demanding recognition of a multiracial classification, there existed two different definitions as to who may be able to claim multiraciality.

One proposal sought to define the multiracial category as “those persons whose parents have origins in different current census categories.” The second proposal for those to be defined as “multiracial” sought to limit inclusion to “those individuals whose parents identify with different races” (Daniel 2002; Davis 2007; Spencer 2003). Though

³ James A. Landreth, Jr.’s *Multiracial Activist* blog, <http://multiracial.com/site/content/view/34/27/>

the definitions are similar, the mere play on words between the two caused a split amongst advocates of the “multiracial” census classification. In the debates over the two proposals for who may claim multiraciality made by advocates of multiracialism one begins to see the sheer complexity of the idea of multiraciality itself. The ambiguous definition of multiraciality has been a major stumbling block for advocates of multiracialism.

Critiques of Multiracialism

The first major critique of multiracialism is that it assumes there are “pure monoracials” to differentiate “multiracials” from (Hernandez 2003). This assumption is problematic for two reasons: 1) 75-90% of Blacks in America are estimated to have white ancestry partly due to the vicious raping of slaves by slaveholders as well as other whites (Collins-Schramm et al. 2002; Feagin 2010a; Kittles and Weiss 2003; Norde 2008; Roberts 1997; Torres and Kittles 2007). Therefore, much of the Black population could be defined as “multiracial;” and 2) these proposals seek to establish a category with the same status as traditional classifications which were designed to identify those groups that have been and still are victims of officially sanctioned oppression at the hands of whites (Feagin 2006; 2010a; Spencer 1999).

The second critique of multiracialism is that it’s fixed within the framework of biological race and is nothing more than an euphemistic re-inscription of this frame (Spencer 1999). Within this biological frame, Feagin (2010a) argues there exists at least three important elements:

1. An accent on physically and biologically distinctive categories or “races”;
2. An emphasis on “race” as the primary determinant of a group’s essential personality and cultural traits; and
3. A hierarchy of superior and inferior racial groups.

Therefore, this racial frame is a white supremacist mechanism used to defend the self proclaimed superiority of whites. In arguing for the creation of a multiracial category, advocates of multiracialism are supporting this frame and asserting that two biologically different “pure” races produce an offspring which is a hybrid of the two races (Hernandez 2003; Spencer 1999; 2003). However, this notion of a biological racial hybrid or “multiracial” has been disproved by current research which supports understanding race as a social construction which is a constant and contentious process not a biological fact (Haney-López 2006; Omi and Winant 1994; Shih et al. 2007).

Social constructionism has shown the concept of race--the belief that a classification based on skin color and other skin-deep properties like body shape or hair style maps onto meaningful, important biological kind--is a pseudo-biological concept that has been used to justify and rationalize the enslavement, genocide, and contemporary terrorism of people of color by whites (Machery and Faucher 2005). Embracing social constructionism, many scholars of multiracialism suggest it is possible to assert a multiracial identity based on the complexity of the racialization process (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Doyle and Kao 2007; Gatson 2003; Renn 2008; 2002; Rockquemore et al. 2009; Shih and Sanchez 2009). However, when placed

in the highly racialized social context that is America, individual proclamations of multiraciality appear to be meaningless (Grillo 2003; Gross 2003; Hernandez 2003; Hickman 2003; Sexton 2008; Spencer 1999; 2006; 2011).

Systemic Analysis of Racism

Racism has been defined as “a fundamental characteristic of social projects which create or reproduce structures of domination based on essentialist categories” (Omi and Winant 1994). However, racism is more than a characteristic of social projects. Racism is a white supremacist mechanism for colonization based on considerations of race. According to Allen (1969), “colonialism can be defined as the direct and over-all subordination of one people, nation, or country to another with state power in the hands of the dominating group.” In America, colonization consists of whites holding and using state power to subjugate people of color. One use of the colonial tool of racism is cultural genocide. According to DuBois (1969):

[Racism] serves to make children believe that every great soul the world ever saw was a white man’s soul; that every great deed the world ever did was a white man’s deed; that every great dream the world ever sang was a white man’s dream...whiteness is ownership of the earth forever and ever.

As DuBois explains, racism’s purpose is to dehumanize people of color and force them to “worship” whiteness. Removing humanity from the colonized, racism allows the colonizer to view people of color as mere subjects to be exploited and disregarded (Allen, 1969). Taine⁴ described the colonizing project in the Americas as one of:

Huge white bodies, cool-blooded, with fierce blue eyes and reddish flaxen hair...Brutal drunken pirates and robbers, they dashed to sea in their two sailed barks, landed anywhere, killed everything; and, having

⁴ Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893): French critic, historian, and philosopher.

sacrificed in honor of their gods the tithe of all their colored prisoners, leaving behind the red light of their burning, went further on to begin again.

In Taine's statement, there is a clear use of racism as a tool to colonize, exploit, and, upon exhausting their resources, destroy civilizations of color. Analyzing racism's foundational role in American society, Feagin developed a theoretical model for racism in America known as "systemic racism."

As Feagin (2006; 2010a; 2010b) explains in great detail, systemic racism has historically shaped and continues to shape the dominant institutions and racialization of groups of people in America. Systemic racism "encompasses a broad range of racialized dimensions of American society: the racist framing, racist ideology, stereotyped attitudes, racist emotions, discriminatory habits and actions, and extensive racist institutions developed over centuries by whites" (Feagin 2006). The first extensive analysis of systemic racism predates Feagin's model and was expressed in a book length argument by the Black scholar Oliver Cromwell Cox in 1948 (Feagin 2010a). In his discussion of Black exploitation and the American centuries old "racial classes," Cox (1948) argues, whites decided "to proletarianize a whole people, that is to say, the whole people is looked upon as a class, whereas white proletarianization involves only a section of the white people." In Cox's work, he makes a clear argument for understanding America as a white supremacist nation from its very inception. Therefore, in both Cox's examination of racial oppression and Feagin systemic model of racial oppression, racism is foundational to American society. Central to the systemic racism model is what Feagin refers to as the "white racial frame."

The White Racial Frame

In 1969, while speaking before Yale's Black Student Alliance, Black intellectual Harold Cruse (2002) explained:

[There is] a kind of cultural nationalism that is implied in our society, namely, the cultural nationalism of the dominant white group. You might call it a kind of cultural "particularism" which is found when you examine the cultural particularism of the Anglo-Saxon group... We find that an ideology exists which *has* to deny the validity of other kinds of cultural values that might compete with its own... We find this particularism of the Anglo-America implicit in all that is done in our society, whether it is done unconsciously or consciously.

This dominant "cultural particularism" is what Feagin refers to as the white racial frame.

Since first contact with people of color, whites have socially, economically, and physically exploited and constructed groups of color from within this framework of racial oppression (Cobas et al. 2009; Feagin 2006; 2010a; 2010b; Feagin and Cobas 2008). The white racial frame has been defined as "the centuries old worldview and racial construction of reality by whites which has rationalized racial oppression and inequality" (Feagin 2010b). This racist frame is characterized by five important features: racial stereotypes; racial narratives and interpretations; racial images and language; racialized emotions; and inclinations to discriminate (Feagin 2010a). More importantly, central to the white racial frame is the idea of white superiority and its counterpart, the belief in the inherent inferiority of the racialized "other" (Feagin and Cobas 2008).

Beginning in colonial America, the highly structured reality of white on Black oppression generated the first incarnation of a color-coded framing of society (Feagin 2006). As Spencer (2003) explains, "the very creation of whiteness as an identity that super-cedes all other identity categories (class, nationality, gender, etc...) was created

simultaneously as the antithesis to the perpetual bondage of Blackness.” Although nearly four centuries have passed since its conception, this frame has not altered its fundamentally pro-white and anti-Black core. For example, the attitudes whites hold toward themselves and toward Blacks often take the form of, on the one hand, the model of white virtue, merit and superior morality and, on the other hand, an “anti-model” of Black deficiency, pathology, and threat (Feagin 2010b). The white racial frame not only distorts human relationships but also desensitizes the minds of whites through the process of social alexithymia in which whites develop a sense of apathy and an inability to understand or relate to the suffering, emotions, and/or experiences of people of color (Feagin 2006; Feagin 2010b). Supporting the belief in whites’ apathetic attitudes toward Black suffering, Curry (2007) argues:

White socialization reproduces white ways of life, white values, and an ideology of white superiority engrained in the narratives and history of American society. Even causal analysis of racial events in American society are framed in ways that uphold white sensibilities of justice and fairness, especially when those events would imply racism as the cause. Empirically, whites will not lend Blacks their ear.

As whites have historically and contemporarily continued to display an inability to empathize with the suffering of people of color, the oppressed within a racialized society have developed counter or resistance-frames to survive and fight the white racial (ist) frame.

Counter-framing

Over the long centuries of racial oppression, Blacks and other targets of whites’ predatory attacks have frequently developed important counter or resistance frames designed to enable survival in an oppressive condition and fight back against their

oppressor (Feagin 2010b). Leaders of racially oppressed groups, as well as the ordinary “grassroots intellectuals,” have long honed the elements of their culture into strong counter-frames (Matsuda 1987). The best example of a strong counter-frame is seen in the Black nationalist movement. The individuals in this movement completely rejected the white framing of society in exchange for their own Black frame which not only preserved their humanity in a dehumanizing racist society but also “understood their collective experience as Black as a central basis for comprehending the significance of various social relations as they are actually lived and experienced” (Peller 1995). The nationalist resistance framing of Blacks as a “nation within a nation” was best articulated in an address by Dr. Clarence Munford in which he stated:

It [the Black nation] is different from other emergent nations only in that it consists of forcibly transplanted colonial subjects who have acquired cohesive identity in the course of centuries of struggle against enslavement, cultural alienation, and spiritual cannibalism of white racism. This common history which the Black people of America share is manifested in a concrete national culture with a peculiar “spiritual complexion,” or psychological temperament. Though the Black nation expresses its thoughts, emotions, and aspirations in the same tongue as American whites, the different conditions of existence...have, from generation to generation, welded the bonds of a national experience as different from that of white existence as day is from night. And what differentiates nations from one another are dissimilar conditions.⁵

Central to a counter-frame, as expressed within the Black nationalist movement, is a reconceptualization of the oppressed’s social position as well as a rejection of elements of the dominate racial frame. It should be made clear however, that neither the dominate white racist frame or a counter-frame operate exclusively in an individual.

⁵ C. Munford, “Black National Revolution in America,” Utah State University (May 1970).

During a given conversation, it is common for people to speak from multiple frames (Wingfield and Feagin 2009). According to Feagin (2010b), “Most people carry several perspectival frames applicable to a particular situation in their heads at the same time. We might call such people “multi-conceptuals” or, even better, “multi-framers.” These “multi-framers” frequently utilize components from contrasting racial frames and variations of those frames to understand the social world. Therefore, it is critical to understand the various frames individuals operate out of if one is to truly understand the rhetoric and actions of a given individual or movement.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND DATA

The primary methodological frame for my study is extended case methodology. According to Burawoy (1991), “the extended case method derives generalizations by constituting a given social situation anomalous regarding some preexisting theory.” Therefore, the goal of the extended case method is to expand existing theory to account for unexplained phenomena. For the purpose of my study, extended case methodology will be applied to Feagin’s theories of the white racial frame and counter-framing. The present conceptualization on the white racial frame and counter-framing describe the counter-frames of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians (Chou and Feagin 2008; Feagin 2010b), however the multiracial community is excluded from analysis.

Given the political activity, community organization, and identity reconstruction of multiracial individuals and interracial families in the multiracial movement, it is critical to examine the possibility of this movement asserting the dominant white racist frame, a racial counter-frame, or possibly both. Through examining the various racial frames articulated by those in the multiracial movement, this research serves to extend Feagin’s theories of the white racial frame and counter-framing to include individuals claiming multiraciality. In extending Feagin’s theories, not only is his theoretical model given more explanatory power, but race scholars will be better equipped to discuss the complexity which characterizes the multiracial movement.

Sampling Procedure

My target population for this study was individuals who were either previously or currently involved in the multiracial movement. Specifically, I wanted to target the founders and presidents, current or past, of multiracial advocacy organizations. This group was of particular interest because I believed as leaders in the movement; they would be able to articulate the goals of the multiracial movement as well as its possible counter-frames. I was able to gain access to the multiracial community through gatekeepers I had previously established within various organizations and academic institutions. After completing the initial interviews, I began to rely on my respondents referring friends and others in the movement to be possible participants. This process of respondents recruiting future subjects from among their social networks is known as “snowball sampling” (Berg 2008). Snowball sampling was critical to this study because many of the organizations’ contact information was out of date. However, my respondents had current contact information for participants from these defunct organizations.

Sample

My sampling procedure resulted in a sample of 15 participants, 6 males and 9 females, who were either multiracial or founders/presidents of multiracial advocacy organizations. Their ages ranged from 32 to 66, with the average age being a little under 50. The majority of respondents resided in the American southwest. However, several participants lived in the American Midwest. In terms of socioeconomic background, the majority of respondents had a middle to upper-middle class background as measured by

their educational backgrounds with 93.3 percent having a college degree. Of those with college degrees, 73.3 percent had graduate degrees. Table 1 below depicts the full demographics of my sample.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Name*	Sex	Age	Racial Identity	Education	Occupation	Years in Movement
Jennifer	F	55	***	High School	Mother	26
Robert	M	61	White	Bachelors	Teacher	26
James	M	61	Multiracial	Doctorate	Professor	22
Mary	F	42	White	Doctorate	Professor	15
Jessica	F	32	Multiracial	Masters	****	6
Valerie	F	41	Asian	Doctorate	Professor	18
Daniel	M	33	Multiracial	Masters	Student	12
Lori	F	66	Multiracial	Doctorate	Professor	17
Jamie	F	37	Multiracial	Doctorate	Professor	8
Natalie	F	46**	Black/Hispanic	J.D.	Professor	*****
Michael	M	63	***	Doctorate	Professor	28
Brittany	F	57	White	Masters	Nurse	25
Sean	M	38	Multiracial	Bachelors	Engineer	18
Lisa	F	59	White	Bachelors	Writer	20
Seth	M	58	***	Doctorate	Professor	28

* All names are pseudonyms.

** Natalie indicated she was between 40-50 but didn't give an exact age.

*** These participants said they prefer to not have a racial identity.

**** Jessica preferred to not share this information for fear of disclosing her identity.

***** Natalie did not feel comfortable supplying her age.

Data Collection

To gather data on the multiracial movement, I conducted twelve one hour individual semi-structured interviews with people involved, currently or in the past, with

the multiracial movement. I chose to collect my data using semi-structured interviews because they would allow me to ask specific predetermined questions while also providing the flexibility to explore unexpected avenues as they arose during the interview (Berg 2008). In addition to the twelve individual interviews, I conducted one focus group with three participants. The use of a focus group to collect data was important because it allowed me to interview multiple individuals at once. Not only did this maximize my participants' time, but it also allowed them to play off of one another's responses. This resulted in my respondents offering information they may have otherwise forgot to mention without another participant bringing it up. Also, discussion between individuals revealed varying opinions on various issues amongst advocates of multiracialism.

Research Questions

The structured segment of the semi-structured interviewing process centered around four questions:

- 1) How do multiracials view themselves?
- 2) How do those in the movement frame their world?
- 3) Do those in the movement resist the white racial frame? If so, how?
- 4) What were their motivations for joining the movement or founding multiracial advocacy organizations?

These questions were selected to be the nucleus of my interviews because I sought to understand the motivations of the multiracial movement and the different racial frames within it. From answering these questions, I would be able to determine if the multiracial

movement possessed a unified worldview and if it was supportive or resistive of the white racial (ist) frame. In order to answer these questions, my research schedule was separated into three sections. The first section was about the individuals' personal involvement in the movement.

In the first part of the interviews, I asked questions (see appendix 1) about who the individual was their motivations for joining the movement, and what they would like to see the movement achieve. This section was very important because it answered questions 1, 3, and 4 of my research project. By understanding the respondents and how they discussed themselves as multiracial, I was able to better examine how the individuals in the movement frame themselves as individual multiracials. Additionally, in asking about the endgame for the movement, I was able to determine if my participants possessed a unified goal for the movement and if it supported or resisted the white racial frame. This section was critical to my overall project because it played a major role in helping me determine how those in the multiracial movement framed themselves and the movement as a whole. After gaining information about the respondent's personal involvement in the movement, I moved to the next section which focused on multiracial politics.

For the section of the interview which examined multiracial politics, the questions I asked were centered around the political activity of the movement during the 1990s leading up to the 2000 census. Within this segment, participants were asked questions to determine if they believed multiracials are a unique racial group that should be recognized as equally valid along with traditional racial groups. Again, this section

played a central role in my understanding of how those in the movement framed themselves and the multiracial community. Based on this understanding, I was able to determine if the dominant framing within the movement was resistive or supportive of the white racial frame. Once I had gathered information on the participants' opinions of multiracial politics, I then moved to my final section of the interview which examined the general racial views of my participants.

This final segment of the interview was a more explicit interrogation of the possibility of multiracial support of colorblindness and white supremacy. In the final section on general racial views, my questions consisted of questions about the notions of post-racialness and colorblindness among the movement. Being that this was a dominant critique of the movement as a whole, it was critical for me to have a section of the interview devoted to post-racialism and colorblindness. The goal of this section was threefold. First, I would once again use acquired information to determine if those within the multiracial movement support the white racial (ist) frame. Second, I wanted to provide my participants the opportunity to address the accusations in the literature. Third, I use the explicit interrogation of a possible white supremacist agenda amongst the movement as a chance to call up emotions from the participants that would grant further insight into the racial framing of the multiracial movement.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter III, I will provide a brief history of the multiracial movement, its key organizations and their major accomplishments and contributions to the movement. The central purpose of this chapter is to provide information about the founders, their

motivations, and the agendas of each of the multiracial advocacy organizations discussed. This information is critical for an in depth discussion of the multiracial movement and its possibility of asserting an affective counter-frame. Additionally, this chapter will examine the philosophical divide within the multiracial movement regarding the U.S. census and its racial classification scheme.

Following the historical discussion of the movement, Chapter IV will discuss the various frames which those in the multiracial movement tend to operate out of. To do this, I will examine how my participants frame themselves, their world, and the multiracial movement. During my interviews, there appeared to be a clear overarching belief that teaching acceptance of racial difference will eliminate racial oppression. Also, the social construction of race is often used to explain the irrationality of racial categorization. However, biological arguments are often used to support the multiracial movement. Both of these themes reveal my participants' identify with the traditional framing of race which articulates race and racism as individual problems, not systemic. Furthermore, by using biology to make racial arguments, the participants are operating out of the racist rhetoric of the white racial frame. Supporting this fact, my interviews reveal strong elements of the white racial frame's anti-Black/Latino/Asian sentiment. These elements and their possible explanations will be examined in this chapter. Though several of the respondents clearly spoke from the white racial frame, there was also a resistance framework articulated during the interviews.

Chapter V serves to discuss the possible elements of a resistance frame in the multiracial movement. Several of the participants note the privilege they experienced

from being light skinned and “closer to whiteness.” Additionally, my respondents generally rejected the colorblind agenda. They voiced an open acknowledgement of the dangers of colorblindness and why we must strive to avoid it. Finally, many of the participants expressed a belief in “multigenerational multiracialism,” the belief that everyone is multiracial. This belief is very important to the multiracial assertion of a counter-frame because it challenges the notion of white purity which is central to the white racial frame.

Finally, Chapter VI will be a critical analysis of the multiracial movement. Using interviews, public documents, as well as literature on the multiracial movement, I will discuss the various frames expressed by the multiracial movement and how they relate to the pursuit for racial justice. To accomplish this, I will analyze the rhetoric and political moves of multiracial advocates which influenced the 1997 OMB “mark all that apply” decision. More specifically, I will explore how the use of the different frames articulated by the multiracial movement either appeal to white interests or of the needs of communities of color. I will then use interest convergence theory to explain the “MATA” decision on the 2000 census and how it serves to support white supremacy through promoting colorblindness.

CHAPTER III

MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS

Prior to its national unveiling at the *Loving* Conference, the multiracial movement had been in an infantile existence for over a decade. Dating back to 1979, there were local pushes for multiracial recognition which included a series of interactions between the state and grassroots multiracial advocacy organizations (Williams 2008). In 1979, there was only one organization: I-Pride of Berkley, California. However, at the height of activity for the multiracial movement, there were approximately forty active organizations.

Despite the large number of organizations pursuing multiracial classification in the 1990s, by 2002, almost all of the organizations had disbanded. The exact reasons for these organization disappearing are unclear. However, it is generally believed that the organizations which are no longer active became defunct after the MATA decision because they no longer had an agenda. At the time of this study, only five strong multiracial advocacy organizations were still active: the AMEA (Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans), Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), APUN (A Place for Us National), MASC (Multiracial Americans of Southern California), and MAVIN foundation. These five organizations can be separated into two categories: political (AMEA, Project RACE, and APUN) and social (MASC and MAVIN foundation). The goal of this chapter is to examine all five of the active multiracial organizations and their contributions in the multiracial movement.

Political Organizations

The AMEA, Project RACE, and APUN all possess one characteristic which sets them apart from MASC and MAVIN foundation--political activity. These three organizations had a very similar endgame, political recognition by the United States government of multiracial Americans. To accomplish this goal, the AMEA petitioned the national government, Project RACE handled local/state governments, with a few national appearances, and APUN made a number of dramatic entrances and exits on both levels (Williams 2008). Despite their political “division of labor,” all three organizations had one goal--political recognition of multiracial Americans. To fully understand the political component of the multiracial movement, it’s critical to examine both the histories and political movement of each of its political organizations.

The AMEA

In April 1986, Carlos Fernandez, who identifies as white and Latino⁶ and was president of I-Pride, joined with John Brown, an interracial married Black man and member of Interracial Family Alliance, to discuss starting a nationwide umbrella organization for the several independent grassroots multiracial advocacy and support groups (Daniel 2002). Two years later on November 12, 1988, the AMEA had its founding meeting and elected Fernandez as its first president and Ramona Douglass, of the Biracial Family Network of Chicago, as its vice-president. At of its first meeting, the AMEA was comprised of fourteen charter member organizations⁷. At this same meeting,

⁶ The “Hispanic/Latino” census category is an ethnic *not* racial category. As it stands, there is much debate as to what exactly this category means and who fits into it.

⁷ The original charter members of the AMEA were: Interracial Family Alliance (Atlanta, Georgia); Interracial Club of Buffalo (New York); Biracial Family Network of Chicago (Illinois); Honor Our Ethnic

the AMEA's leaders sought to develop both two and five year plans for the organization. For their first five years as an organizations, the AMEA had five major goals: establish an educational and/or legal defense fund; create a multicultural resource center or institute; staff a political action committee to lobby for changes to official forms; establish an AMEA hotline/switchboard to disseminate information; and provide solutions to interracial/multiracial problems that arise across the nation (Brown and Douglass 1996). To the dismay of the AMEA's members, some of these ideas didn't make it off the drawing board. However, this is not to say the AMEA did not accomplish some of its goals.

According to Brown and Douglass (1996) by 1994, the AMEA had: incorporated with 501c3 (nonprofit) status pending; established a national 800 number: 1-800-523-AMEA; testified before Congress through its PAC on the necessity for creating a multiracial/multiethnic category on all federal forms; created an educational/legal advisory board with connections to prestigious institutions of learning across the country; and formed alliances with other national advocacy groups such as Project RACE to monitor local/state and federal activities affecting the multiracial community. Though it took six years instead of five, the AMEA did accomplish many of its goals stated in its initial five year plan. At the time of this study, the AMEA is recognized among multiracial advocates as a secular, non-denominational organization open to people of all faiths as well as various racial/ethnic backgrounds. Though many of its

Youth (Eugene, Oregon); A Place for Us Ministries (Gardena, California); Interracial Family Alliance (Houston, Texas); Multiracial Americans of Southern California (Los Angeles, California); Interracial Connections (Norfolk, Virginia); Parents of Interracial Children (Omaha, Nebraska); Interracial Families, Inc. (Pittsburg, Pennsylvania); IMAGE (San Diego, California), I-Pride (San Francisco, California); Interracial Network (Seattle, Washington); and Interracial Family Circle (Washington, D.C.).

original charter members have left since the 1997 MATA decision, “the AMEA’s ranks have been joined by individual members, fledgling student groups, and others interested in promoting positive images of the multiracial/multiethnic community” (Brown and Douglass 1996; 2003).

Project RACE

In 1990, finding no suitable category for her son on the census, Susan Graham, the white mother of two mixed race children, called the Census Bureau. After being told by the phone operator to identify her son with her race “because in cases like these, we always know who the mother is and not the father,”⁸ Graham recognized a clear problem with the Census Bureau’s racial classification scheme. To address this irrational system, Graham along with Chris Ashe, another white mother with mixed race children, founded Project RACE in 1991. According to Project RACE, their goal is to “advocate for multiracial children and adults through education, community awareness and legislation. Our main goal is for a multiracial classification on all school, employment, state, federal, local, census and medical forms requiring racial data.”⁹ Project RACE has been very successful in pressuring legislators to pass bills which address the issues of the multiracial community

Project RACE has had many significant legislative accomplishments beginning with Ohio’s Am. Sub. H.B. No. 154, in 1992, and Illinois’ S.B. 421-Public Act 88-71 in 1993 (Brown and Douglass 1996). However, in 1994, Project RACE was able to pressure Georgia into passing a model piece of multiracial legislation named Senate Bill

⁸ Taken from Kim M. Williams’ in-person interview with Susan Graham, April 16, 1998.

⁹ Project RACE, <http://www.projectrace.com/aboutprojectrace/>,

149. What set this bill aside from the Ohio and Illinois bills was that it not only forced Georgia to place a multiracial identifier on school forms, as was the case with the Ohio and Illinois bills, but it also required a multiracial option to be placed on all state agency forms, as well as all employment forms and applications (Graham 1996). Following its success in Georgia, Project RACE, along with the AMEA, was asked to testify before the Congressional Subcommittee on the Census in June about the urgent need for multiracial classification. Following this Congressional appearance, in late 1994, Project RACE was asked to represent multiracial people once more at a meeting of federal government agencies at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington D.C. (Brown and Douglass 1996). According to Graham, “it was at this meeting that we were able to fully discuss our future needs on the federal level and gain needed support for the civil rights of multiracial children and adults.”¹⁰

Since the 1997 OMB MATA decision, Project RACE has focused its energy toward the medical field arguing “Without accurate racial designations, multiracial children are at risk for improper medical screening for diseases that affect certain racial groups. Another area of concern is bone marrow transplantation for patients with leukemia and other blood diseases, where the best chance of a match is within the same genetic pool of potential donors.”¹¹ Though currently focusing on the medical concerns

¹⁰ This quote was taken from personal correspondence between Ramona E. Douglass and Susan Graham during 1994.

¹¹ Project RACE, <http://www.projectrace.com/urgentmedicalconcern/>; Recent research in the biological sciences has identified group-based genetic boundaries with their own predispositions. Group-based is *not* the same as race-based. Individuals within the same “group” are linked by either geographic location or a common ancestry. On the other hand, individuals in the race are only linked by a common ascribed status and social experience. However, for those unfamiliar with the literatures on race and biology, these terms are believed to be interchangeable.

of multiracial children, at the high of the multiracial movement, Project RACE made very significant political gains for the movement.

APUN

A Place for Us National, originally A Place for Us Ministries, was founded in 1984 by interracial couple Steve and Ruth White. The Whites decided to establish APUN after Steve's minister refused to marry the two. Eventually, the couple both became ordained ministers themselves and began providing counseling services, performing marriages, organizing workshops, and coordinating Bible studies for interracial Christian couples in Southern California. As for the political agenda of APUN, the White's have outlined five goals: to bring racial harmony or racial tolerance to all families who seek it; to seek to respect people of different cultures, nationalities and ethnicities; to alert people of subtle racial separatism in many religious institutions and change it; to establish communication within the workplace, education systems, adoption and foster care agencies, friendships and personal relationships; and to work with other multiracial groups to establish a multiracial category and eventually eliminate all racial classifications.¹²

In 1989, APUN and the AMEA collaborated on the Douglass-White Proposal. In the proposal, AMEA and APUN vaguely outlined a call to eliminate the "one drop rule" as sanctioned by the government (Williams 2008). The proposal ultimately failed due to its poor construction (Sexton 2008; Spencer 1999). Following the defeat of the Douglass-White Proposal, APUN began planning a sunrise event for January 1, 1990

¹² A Place for Us National, <http://www.aplaceforusnational.com/home>

they referred to as the “Love Chain.” The goal of the Love Chain was to be a mass demonstration in which “each participant would pledge not to judge others by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” APUN decided to dedicate the Love Chain to Barbara Bush who “publicly stated that she would like to see a colorblind society.”¹³ However, claiming New Years Day was an inconvenient time for most Americans, APUN cancelled the Love Chain (Williams 2008). APUN went on to be a short lived member of the AMEA. This relationship was soon brought to an end because of the “gay issue.”¹⁴ Following the OMB MATA decision, APUN went on to speak before C-SPAN on March 31, 2000 about the issues facing multiracial families. Additionally, founder Ruth White had a failed attempt in the 2008 Presidential race. Today, APUN prefers to focus on the medical issues of multiracial children and in 2009 celebrated its 25th anniversary under the banner “A Place for Us: Moving America towards a colorblind society since 1984.”¹⁵

Social Organizations

Contrasting the political nature of the AMEA, Project RACE, and APUN, MASC and MAVIN foundation focus exclusively on the social needs of multiracials. The major social organizations of the multiracial movement have decided to focus their efforts towards providing a social space in which multiracial children and adults, as well as

¹³ APUN, “For the Good of America”, 1989, flyer.

¹⁴ APUN frequently states their dislike for multiracial advocacy organizations supporting gay rights because it contrasts APUN’s Christian focus. In person correspondence with the founders, they stated, “One thing that some of the more liberal groups did do was that they lumped the multiracial identity question with the homosexual issue. That came up time and time again in the media where homosexuals would cite the multiracial movement as a reason to let them get married. They said getting married to somebody of the same gender is the same as marrying somebody of a different race... They did it time after time after time. We wouldn’t allow that to go unchallenged and some people became very uncomfortable with that.”

¹⁵ A Place for Us National, <http://www.aplaceforusnational.com/home>

interracial couples, may freely express their multiraciality and have their identities reaffirmed. The primary purpose of these organizations is to provide support systems for the multiracial community. To accomplish this goal, the social organizations specialize in organizing community picnics, “family fun days,” “play dates,” and large scale academic databases on issues related to multiracialism. To really understand the social component of the multiracial movement, it’s critical to examine the foundations and activities of each of the remaining major social organizations.

MASC

While giving a community talk on the issues facing interracial couples, Lavonne Gaddy, a multiracial adult, met Nancy Brown, a partner in an interracial marriage and mother of two mixed race children. After a series of conversations, in 1987, Gaddy and Brown established a core group interested in developing a multiracial support network to meet the educational, cultural, and social needs of racially blended couples, families, and individuals (Brown and Douglass 1996). This small group would go on to become MASC. For its goals as an organization, MASC proclaims they are “seeking to broaden self and public understanding of our interracial, multiethnic, and cross cultural society by facilitating interethnic dialogue and providing cultural, educational, and recreational activities.”¹⁶ Since its founding, MASC has continued to put on annual picnics, “mixed roots festivals,” and quarterly social mixers. In addition to providing state level social events, on November 5-6, 2010, MASC hosted the 1st annual “Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference” at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. At the time of this study,

¹⁶Multiracial Association of Southern California, <http://www.mascsite.org/>

MASC continues to be one of the leading social support groups for multiracial Americans.

MAVIN Foundation

In 1998, Matt Kelley, a 19-year-old freshman at Connecticut's Wesleyan University announced his intent to launch a national magazine dedicated to the "mixed race experience." He chose the name "mavin," which has roots in Yiddish and means "one who understands." Within one week, he received over 100 responses from people eager to subscribe or become involved. In, 2000, just one year after publishing the first edition of *Mavin* in 1999, *MAVIN magazine* became the 501(c)3 nonprofit MAVIN Foundation, which is "dedicated to creating a diverse spectrum of projects that celebrate and advocate for mixed race people and families."¹⁷ MAVIN foundation argues its primary goal is to "build pathways to healthier communities by celebrating the mixed heritage experience and providing awareness and educational resources through innovative programs, cutting edge technologies, collaboration with other mixed-heritage organizations, and evidence-based program development and research" in order to "be the most comprehensive resource to expand awareness and bring mixed heritage issues to the forefront of mainstream dialogue."¹⁸ MAVIN foundation differs from MASC in that it doesn't put on physical social events for the multiracial community. Instead, MAVIN foundation has strived to be a resource and support center for multiracial families and individuals. MAVIN's largest accomplishment, with the help of the AMEA, has been establishing the Mixed Heritage Center, "a clearinghouse of information and

¹⁷ MAVIN foundation, <http://www.mavinfoundation.org/about/history.html>

¹⁸ MAVIN foundation, <http://www.mavinfoundation.org/about/mission.html>

resources relevant to the lives of people who are multiracial, multiethnic, transracially adopted or otherwise impacted by the intersections of race and culture,”¹⁹ in 2007.

Summary

As exhibited in this chapter, the multiracial movement is not a monolith. It is comprised of different organizations with agendas ranging from solely political to exclusively social. The political organizations of the multiracial movement have focused their efforts toward gaining multiracial recognition on the national stage as well as at the individual state level. Some organizations have been very successful in obtaining this goal. Project RACE was particularly successful in achieving political recognition with the passing of Georgia Senate Bill 149 which required multiracial classification on all school, employment, and application forms. Others such as APUN, have made dramatic entrances into the political arena, but have accomplished significantly less than their counterparts. Contrasting the political organizations, social organizations such as MASC and MAVIN foundation have positioned themselves to be support systems, both physically and academically, for the multiracial community. Among the social organizations, the two major accomplishments have been MAVIN foundation establishing the Mix Heritage Center and MASC’s Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference. Despite the different agendas of the organizations in the multiracial movement, the remaining multiracial advocacy organization are all focused on catering to the needs of the multiracial community whether the needs be political or social.

¹⁹ Mixed Heritage Center, <http://www.mixedheritagecenter.org/>

The multiracial movement is a complex array individuals pursuing very different agendas for the multiracial community. In order to achieve their personal goals for multiracials, multiracial advocates frequently flock to organizations representing their views on multiracialism and race in general. Within these organizations, various racial frames are articulated which appeal to individuals claiming multiraciality or advocating for it. Therefore, the racial frames expressed by multiracial advocacy organizations require an in depth analysis if the multiracial movement is to be properly discussed. Whether the traditional white racist frame, a counter-frame, or mixture of both, the racial frames expressed by the multiracial movement hold the key to fully understanding multiracial advocacy.

CHAPTER IV

RACIST FRAMING

As explained in the previous chapter, the multiracial movement is a very diverse movement comprised of many organizations with different agendas. However, despite the diversity of organizations, there are overarching ideological frames within the movement which must be identified if one is to fully understand the multiracial movement. In depth analysis of conversations with my respondents presented several major frames. One of the overarching frames identified is the very traditional white racist frame which biologizes race, stresses colorblind rhetoric, and views racism as an individual rather than systemic problem. This frame was often used in my respondents' conversations about race in America and the need for establishing a multiracial census category. The goal of this chapter is to examine the identified elements of the white racist frame in the multiracial movement and determine how these elements affect the pursuit of racial justice for the oppressed. To begin a discussion of the elements of the dominant racist frame used by advocates of multiracialism, I will start with a brief discussion of various components of the traditional white racist frame.

The Traditional White Racial (ist) Frame

The traditional white racist framing of society encompasses both a positive orientation to whites and whiteness and a negative orientation to those racial "others" who are to be oppressed and victimized by whites. Simply put, this traditional frame is viciously negative and ethnocentric toward people of color (Feagin 2010b). As DuBois (1969) plainly stated, in the Western world, "The one value is to be white" and this value

pushes whites' to the inevitable conclusion "kill the nigger." This is the core of whites' racist frame. To support this frame and justify their predatory attacks on people of color, whites have constructed a myriad of racist elements that strengthen their white supremacist frame. The components of this frame typically come in two variations that Wingfield and Feagin (2009) refer to as "hard" and "soft" racial framing.

Hard racial framing is characterized by explicit expressions of white supremacy. Historically, this frame has made the argument that races are biologically unequal, as well as culturally unequal with whites being superior. Furthermore, hard racial frames proclaim Blacks as well as other people of color "should know their place." Overall, this method of framing argues whites are superior culturally, morally, and biologically and therefore have the right to dominate the "inferior" races (Wingfield and Feagin 2009). However, in a given situation, the articulation of "hard" racial framing may be viewed as socially incorrect, generally inappropriate, or taboo. To account for such situations, whites have developed an alternative "soft" yet equally racist frame.

Soft racial framing can be described as more implicit expressions of white supremacy. Those speaking from a "soft" frame claim race and racism are no longer important and America is becoming increasingly "colorblind." Furthermore, this frame asserts only those people of color who "think white, look white and talk white" are acceptable and if they do so they can be "successful." Overall, the "soft" racial frame argues whites are culturally superior more so than biological superior (Wingfield and Feagin 2009). Both "hard" and "soft" variations of the white racial frame were identified in my conversations with individuals active in the multiracial movement. To begin the

analysis of the frames utilized by multiracial advocates, I will start with the hard framing of biological race.

Biological Race

According to the biological explanation of race, racial superiority and inferiority are the natural order of humankind. In this frame, whites are considered the superior race; white skin is normative and all other skin colors are exotic mutations which must be explained. Central to this frame is the equating of race with distinct hereditary characteristics. Difference in intelligence, temperament, and sexuality, among other traits, are deemed as racial characteristics (Feagin 2010a; Omi and Winant 1994). The biological race component of the white racist frame has been used to support the Black holocaust of American slavery as well as the “slavery by another name” system of Jim Crow. In framing Blacks as biologically inferior to whites, the hard framing of biological race was able to justify the atrocities committed against Blacks as the “natural order of things.” Ironically, this very racist biological framing of race is one of the very frames used by the multiracial movement, a group which professes a commitment to racial justice, to argue for the creation of a multiracial census category.

Among multiracial advocates, there exists a dominant belief that a child resulting from two parents of different races should be identified with both races (Zack 1995). For example, if a child has a Black father and a white mother, the child should be recognized as both Black *and* white. This belief was clearly expressed in a conversation with Lisa, a fifty-nine year old white and mother of two mixed-race children. When asked about the benefits of working for a multiracial advocacy organization, Lisa explained:

I think the biggest benefit has been exposing the medical concerns our children have and being able to make a difference in the lives of them medically. Not to say that the multiracial label and classification are not important, but when we're talking about life and death and bone marrow and children not being included in medical studies. That has been the most difficult thing for me, dealing with sick children. Let me give you an example, Barack Obama. His mother is white, his father is Black. He can say all day that he's Black and that's his right, but I want my kids to have the opportunity to address all their heritage. If it came down to President Obama or his daughters needing a blood donor he would have to look to his *DNA and his gene pool* and he would find his donor in the *multiracial gene pool*. That's something that can't be denied. *So that means multiracials are a racial group unto itself because when we get down to DNA and genes that's how it is.* [Emphasis added]

In Lisa's statement, she clearly expresses a belief in the genetic differences between races by suggesting there is a "multiracial gene pool." However, in suggesting there is a multiracial gene pool, Lisa is asserting there are "natural" Black and white exclusive and pure gene pools. This is the inherent danger in the multiracial movement using the language of genetics without understanding the implications of their rhetoric. As Shriver and Kittles (2008) argue, the use of genetics rhetoric regarding race without thoroughly understanding it "is often misinterpreted as indications of "real" racial divisions, even if they [genetic boundaries groups and personal genetic histories] are explicitly acknowledged as being continuous and, to some extent, arbitrary groups." Therefore, Lisa's argument is a clear expression of the biological race element of the traditional white racist frame because suggesting there are racially "pure" gene pools lends itself to an inevitable creation of a hierarchy of races which will undoubtedly position whites as the superior normative race. History has proven time and time again whites are always looking for some means to justify their domination of the colored peoples of the world and explicit arguments about racial "gene pools" like those presented by Lisa presents

whites the perfect opportunity. Most advocates of multiracialism are not as explicit in their claims as Lisa. A more common means of expressing the biological race element of the traditional white racist frame by multiracial advocates is discussing the medical necessity of a multiracial classification.

To expedite the creation of a multiracial census classification, organizations within the movement frequently argue there is a medical necessity of such a category (Sexton 2008; Spencer 1999). When discussing the direction of the multiracial movement in the future, Brittany, a fifty-seven year old nurse explained:

One important direction is focusing on the medical field and things like medication trials. How do we do accurately do medication trials when you're not using people of mixed race heritage? How that will impact the study or research is very important.

Further supporting the belief of the medical necessity for a multiracial census classification is Jennifer, a fifty-five year old activist, who stated, "Well the health issues is a different but important issue. We have to know the different background because of the *genetic makeup* of different groups and the diseases they are prone to." Both Jennifer's and Brittany's statements are representative of the common implicit use of a biological notion of race among multiracial advocates. In arguing for the need for mix-race participants in medical studies because they are genetically different from "monoracials," those within the movement are implicitly asserting there is a unique multiracial gene pool which must be explored by the medical profession. Again, such assertions play into notions of biologically pure races. This biological component of the white racist frame was expressed both explicitly, as seen in the conversation with Lisa, and implicitly, as seen in Jennifer's and Brittany's statements. The hard racial framing of

biological race is by far one of the oldest elements of whites' racist frame and reigned as the dominate racial rhetoric since 1600s. However, in the mid-1900s, due so various social factors, there arose a need to change the dominant racist rhetoric in America.

Colorblindness

After World War II turning whites' hard framing of biological race against another group of whites, there came a need to re-articulate whites' racist frame in a way that could not be used against fellow whites and reflected their contemporary needs (Mills 1997). Sidney Willhelm (1976) explains:

Throughout its history, White America adjusts its expression of racism to accord with its economic imperatives and modifies its myths of racism to take into account the shifting economic circumstances...White America generates a new ideology to sanction any fundamental alteration in race relations growing out of basic economic modifications.

It was not until the Civil Rights movement, that whites fully replaced the "hard" racial framing seen in Jim Crow and slavery with a "softer" but equally oppressive rhetoric as the dominant and politically acceptable form of racial oppression. This "soft" racist rhetorical strategy was designed to be perceived as socially correct and egalitarian. However, at its core, it remained equally committed to white supremacy. This "soft" rhetorical mechanism was the colorblind lie. According to Carr (1997), "colorblindness was the best way to maintain white supremacy." It should be made clear this was not a new method of racial oppression. The colorblind lie can be seen as far back as Justice Harlan's dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In his dissent, Harlan argued:

In my view of the constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our constitution is colorblind and neither knows nor tolerates class among citizens. In respect to civil rights, all citizens are equal before the

law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights are guaranteed by the supreme law of the land.²⁰

Prior to Harlan's dissent, the soft framing of colorblindness had been used for centuries by "liberal" whites and abolitionists (DuBois 1969; Peller 1995). The major change that took place in the mid-1900s was merely a change in the acceptable form of racism.

According to Bonilla-Silva (2003):

Colorblind racism became the dominant racial ideology as mechanisms and practices for keeping Blacks and other racial minorities "at the bottom" changed...In contrast to the Jim Crow era, where racial inequality was enforced through overt means (e.g., signs saying "No Niggers Welcomed Here" or shotgun diplomacy at the voting booth), today racial practices operate in "now you see it, now you don't" fashion.

Racism is a foundational component of American society. Colorblindness is simply the latest manifestation (Carr 1997). The colorblind mechanism particularly appealed to whites because it not only allowed them to continue to terrorize and generally oppress people of color, but it also allowed them to frame themselves as victims of the white racist notion of "reverse discrimination" (Feagin 2010a; 2010b). Based on this racist lie, "to see race is racist. All society must turn a blind eye to race especially the law. By this logic, we find people asserting the NAACP is a racist organization because it's not colorblind" (Carr 1997). A major problem of the colorblind lie is it prevents scholars of color from producing relevant scholarship because race consciousness has historically been at the heart of their work. Framing race consciousness as racist, whites have left Black scholars to simply regurgitate racist white theory. A second problem of the colorblind ideology is that it ignores the centuries of whites' unjust enrichment and

²⁰ Justice Harlan's dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163, U.S. 537 (1896)

unjust impoverishment of people of color and thereby makes the assumption that all people are equal on every level. Therefore, if all things are equal, the “lack of success” of communities of color are their own fault. This is the main purpose of the colorblind mechanism--to preserve the alleged moral character of whites and act as a cover for the continued framing people of color as dysfunctional and “primitive.” As Roy L. Brooks (2009) explains:

While traditionalists acknowledge that African Americans continue to struggle for worldly success and personal happiness decades after the end of the civil rights movement, they contend that capital deficiencies in today’s Black society are sustained by circumstances for which Blacks themselves are responsible. Black-on-Black crime, high rates of out-of-wedlock births, low academic performance in the classroom and on standardized tests, low occupational status, low wages, and poor housing are the products of a dysfunctional cultural orientation in Black society. This exert from Brooks reveals the real message of the colorblind lie is that people of color are inherently inferior culturally and morally to whites. Therefore, colorblindness is nothing more than a “cover” for white supremacy and explicit racist beliefs.

Convinced the increases in intermarriage post-*Loving* signifies race doesn’t matter, many advocates of multiracialism express a committed belief to this colorblind ideology (Sexton 2008; Spencer 1999). When asked about the continued racial inequality in America, Lisa expressed an explicit belief in colorblindness stating:

I believe in a colorblind America, so that’s what I want...We [Lisa and Robert] were the first to use the term colorblind in the movement...They [Blacks] just want excuses for doing the things that they’re doing. They don’t want to be called on the carpet and held accountable for the things they’re doing.

In Lisa’s statement, she openly professes a desire for a colorblind America and reveals her commitment to this racist frame through arguing Blacks “just want excuses for doing

the things they're doing." In making such an argument, Lisa is both preserving the alleged virtue of whites by ignoring their central role in shaping the contemporary Black community and proclaiming Black culture to be dysfunctional in nature. Even more disturbing is what this statement reveals about Lisa's willingness as a Black woman to easily reject her own culture, community, and heritage in exchange for a dim lit corner in the white man's dining hall. However, this is very typical middle class leaders in racially "progressive" movements such as the multiracial movement and even the Civil Rights movement. Frequently, middle class people of color will reject their own heritage and culture in hopes of becoming part of mainstream white America (Allen 1969)

The most common means of evoking the colorblind element of the white racist frame is the typical bastardization of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech. According to Brown et. al (2003), advocates of colorblindness frequently use King's "content of character" statement to justify the colorblind agenda. This was a very common occurrence amongst the respondents in this study. While having a conversation about race-consciousness and the persistent inequality in America, Michael, a sixty-three year old white man, explained:

My ultimate achievement is twofold. One is to ultimately abolish racial categories in this country. If we need to do things around educational access it needs to be based on need, not race. We need things to be needs based. Yes there are African Americans with needs, but there are other racial groups with needs. We need to get away from believing we are the color of our skin. That's just crazy. Martin Luther King said so clearly, it's the content of your character, not the color of your skin. We aren't trying to be colorblind. Color is like other characteristics like height and weight. No we should not be colorblind, but we should find ways of treating people the same regardless of their color. I get very angry when the critics say we're trying to be colorblind because we are not. White privilege is not as strong as it's made out to be. It's like working on an

Indian reservation and if you're not part of the tribe you have no power. The same thing I see in some Black organization in which if you're not Black you don't have any power. In general there is white privilege, but in specific contexts it doesn't exist.

Michael's statement reveals the multi-conceptual nature of the multiracial movement.

While professing to not be an advocate of colorblindness, Michael is clearly arguing for it. Through arguing "we are not the color of our skin" and "color is like height and weight," Michael is attempting to diminish race to nothing more than phenotype and completely ignoring the sociopolitical nature of race. Furthermore, in arguing "white privilege is not as strong as it's made out to be," Michael is preserving the morality of whiteness by asserting whites' don't experience racial benefits in American society.

Reviewing Michael's statement, it is only appropriate to characterize him as a multi-framer. While he argues he is not an advocate of colorblindness evoking somewhat of a counter-frame, he explicitly attempts to minimize the sociopolitical importance of race and preserve the virtue of whites which are both at the very core of the colorblind white racist agenda. Further evoking Dr. King, when asked about the importance of race in America, Robert, a sixty-one year old white man, argued:

I think Dr. King's statement, that a man should be judged by the content of his character and not the color of his skin, when you try to put that into practical life some people get offended by saying you're lessening my Blackness or the value of being Black.

Again, here in Robert's statement there is an evocation of Dr. King to justify colorblindness. Similar to Lisa and Michael, Robert frames Blacks as the reason for inequality. In his statement, Robert asserts whites want to treat Blacks equally, however, when whites do so, Blacks prevent equality by arguing whites are "lessening the value of

being Black.” Robert appears to be ignoring the sociopolitical nature of race just as Michael. It is not that Blacks want special treatment for being Black. What Blacks are calling for is recognition of whites’ role in impoverishing contemporary Black society. Therefore, when Blacks proclaim their Blackness is being devalued, what they are saying is there are sociopolitical structures which have created Blacks as a race and to ignore these structures perpetuates racial inequality.

Intense review of my conversations with my respondents reveals a clear expression of the traditional white racist frame in both its hard form of biological race and its soft counterpart of colorblindness. The notion of biological race was often used to explain the identity and medical necessity of a multiracial census category. Additionally, in many of the arguments presented by my respondents, there was a clear adherence to the notion of colorblindness. In the statements of Lisa, Robert, and Michael, the colorblind agenda’s goal of preserving whites’ alleged morality, minimizing the importance of race, blaming Blacks for the issues in their communities were present either implicitly or explicitly. Along with the colorblind mechanism of the traditional white racist frame, my respondents frequently utilized what Jane Hill (2008) refers to as the “folk theory of race and racism.”

Individualistic Framing of Racism

In her book *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, Hill explores the different ways in which racism manifests itself and common misconceptions about racism. In her discussion of what she refers to as folk theory, Hill states:

Folk theory holds that racism is entirely a matter of individual beliefs, intentions, and actions. In the folk theory, a racist is a person who

believes that people of color are biologically inferior to whites, so that white privilege is deserved and must be defended. Racism is what this kind of white supremacist thinks and does. The folk theory holds that such people are anachronisms, who are ignorant, vicious, and remote from the mainstream. Their ignorance can be cured through education. Their viciousness can be addressed by helping them enjoy new advantages so that they have self-esteem and will not have to look down on others. Since education and general well-being are increasing, racism should soon disappear entirely, except as a sign of mental derangement or disability.

Central to the folk theory as described by Hill is the notion that racism is an individualistic problem which can be “educated” away. According to folk theory, only “card carrying” white supremacists are racist but even they can be taught “not to look down on others.” This is a very common belief amongst the multiracial movement. While having a discussion with James about possible ways to address racial oppression, James explained:

We also have to teach children how to deal with difference. You will always have sociopaths, but we aren’t using our education system to the best of our abilities, right now it’s nothing more than a system of social control. We need to use it to broaden peoples’ understanding of the world. We need to use the classroom as a revolutionary tool.

In James’ statement there is a clear belief in the ability to “educate away” racism by teaching children “how to deal with difference.” This is a textbook example of the utilization of folk theory to explain racism. Further evoking the folk explanation of racism, James mentions the inevitability of racial sociopaths who can’t be educated. This assumption falls in line with Hill’s argument that folk theory states, “Since education and general well-being are increasing, racism should soon disappear entirely, except as a sign of mental derangement or disability.” In framing white supremacy as an individual act by a sociopath, James is completely ignoring the systemic nature of racial

oppression. Continuing with the individualist framing of racism is Sean, a thirty-eight year old multiracial organizer. When asked about the importance of race in America, Sean explained, “Even young children start to see race. What’s important is the value we assign to that difference. It’s not a problem acknowledging that somebody is Black or white the problem is the value we assign to those differences.” Again, in Sean’s statement there is a clear belief that if children are taught to assign a different meaning to what it means to be Black or white that racism will be eliminated. The fundamental flaw in this argument is that it doesn’t address the historical context which created the races. Expression a clear rejection of the historical context of race and racism is Robert. While recounting on an incident that took place on the city bus, Robert stated:

I was on the bus one day and I was getting hit with spit-wads from this Black kid on the bus. I asked him why he was doing it and he said, “Because you’re white.” When he said that I looked at him and asked, “What do you call someone who does something to someone because of the color of their skin?” He said, “A racist.” Then I said, “Exactly.” I just left him with that. I hate when they only white people can be racist so I like to show them Black people are just as racist.

Robert’s statement reveals the real danger of folk theory to be that it leads to one conclusion---everyone can be racist. However, this is completely false. Racism is a power-based political structure centered on oppression, not an just something someone does to another person because of the color of their skin. Therefore, people of color cannot be racist because they do not have any sociopolitical power. The lie that anyone can be racist is a major problem of folk theory as well as colorblindness. The individualist framing of racism ignores the systemic nature of racial oppression and only

recognizes a symptom of a much larger problem. Only through analyzing the systemic nature of racism can racial oppression begin to be addressed and solutions explored.

Summary

Framing the multiracial movement as a movement comprised of multi-framers, this chapter has identified the elements of the traditional white racist frame used by advocates of multiracialism. Critical analysis of conversations with my participants revealed a utilization of the hard racial framing of biological race, the soft racial framing of colorblindness, and racism as an individual problem which are all key elements of the dominate white racist frame. For the larger discussion of the multiracial movement, it is critical to recognize the utilization of these multiple frames by advocates of multiracialism. The multiracial movement is neither exclusively a colorblindness or biological race movement. As this chapter has shown, multiracial advocates use both of these frames. Acknowledging this reality reveals the complexity of the movement and its frames. Therefore, it is critical to recognize that the multiracial movement should not be characterized as a monolith. It is much more complex than that. The multiracial movement expresses many different and often opposing frames sometimes even in the same conversation, as illustrated by Michael. Though this chapter spent a good amount of time focusing on the aspects of multiracial advocacy which express the traditional white racist frame, there is another side to the story of the multiracial movement. Just as there are two sides to a coin, there are two sides to the multiracial movement. Contrasting the racist framing discussed in this chapter, there are elements of multiracial

advocacy which are adamant about opposing white supremacy which deserve attention if the multiracial movement is to be properly analyzed.

CHAPTER V

COUNTER-FRAMING

The individuals in the multiracial movement can best be described as “multi-framers,” individuals who operate out of different frames from one moment to the next. As covered in the previous chapter, advocates of multiracialism express the traditional white racist frame. In addition to this overarching frame, critical analysis of my conversations with individuals in the movement revealed an active counter-frame to the dominant white racist frame. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the counter-frame expressed in conversations with multiracial advocates in order to paint a more complete picture of the multiracial movement.

The multiracial counter-frame is characterized by four themes. The first is an open acknowledgment of white/light skin privilege. In this component of the counter-frame, multiracials acknowledge the benefits they receive from being “light-skinned.” This is considered part of a counter-frame because in acknowledging the existence of white/light skin privilege, those in the movement are debunking the racist myth that Blacks and whites are on an equal playing field. The second element of the multiracial counter-frame is an open rejection of colorblindness and the colorblind lie. From this perspective, race as a sociopolitical construct is very important. Therefore, colorblindness must be understood as a cover for white supremacy which must be rejected. The third aspect of the multiracial counter-frame is something I refer to as “multigenerational multiracialism.” In this component of the frame, it is believed that there is no “pure” race and everyone has a claim to multiracialism. While this claim is

subject to white manipulation for colorblind purposes, it is important to the multiracial counter-frame because it challenges whites' belief in the "pure white race." The fourth and final element of the multiracial counter-frame is something I will refer to as the "multiracial heritage" frame. Within this multidimensional frame, people who perceive themselves as multiracial either believe they are a unique racial group with its own heritage or are members of a larger community of color. This frame was frequently expressed in respondents' discussion of themselves as individuals and a movement. To begin an in depth discussion of the three themes of the multiracial counter-frame, I will start with a discussion of white/light skin privilege.

Light Skin Privilege

Since the founding of America, whiteness and white skin have been established as normative with any deviation considered abnormal and subhuman. DuBois best describes this orientation in *The Soul of White Folk*. While discussing his observations of whites, DuBois (1969) explains there is an overarching tone amongst whites which says:

My poor, un-white thing! Weep not nor rage. I know, too well, that the curse of God lies heavy on you. Why? That is not for me to say, but be brave! Do your work in your lowly sphere, praying the good Lord that into heaven above, where all is love, you may, one day, be born white!

It is this overarching belief in the value of white skin which has created the dominate racial frame which grants privileges to those possessing Americas greatest value-- whiteness. Whiteness has been such a valued possession in American society that it has even been given all the legal rights of property (Harris 1993). However, at various times in American history, "light skinned" people of color, often multiracial, have been

awarded superficial benefits for their closeness to whiteness (Daniel 2007; Korgen 1998).

In the many conversations I had with advocates of multiracialism, several of them discussed the privileges they were granted due to having a lighter phenotype. In a discussion about the benefits she receives for being multiracial Jamie explained:

I'm half white, so I experience white skin privilege. There are a lot of benefits to having a white parent. When it comes to like getting jobs, I benefit because I don't look that different than the whites there. I'm kind of "off-white" but I'm not an "other." I can fulfill a diversity requirement without making somebody feel incredibly uncomfortable.

Supporting this claim, Valerie stated:

I found that my experience and those of other people with one white parent tend to trump other experiences. Not always trump, but our experiences are more congruent that I would have expected. It's like having one white parent is a very important factor in our experiences. I never expected that because I don't identify as white nor do the people I know who have one white parent yet we find ourselves talking about experiences and various aspects of white privilege.

In the statements from Jamie and Valerie there is a clear recognition of the role their "light" skin has played in their lives. Jamie made a very important point in our conversation when she mentioned the ability to "fulfill a diversity requirement without making somebody feel incredible uncomfortable."

By granting "light-skinned" people of color access to certain white spaces, whites are able to secure their comfortable racist lifestyle while adhering to federal discrimination policies. Through revealing this reality, multiracials resist the dominate racial frames' white supremacist myth that "I got this job because I worked hard." Critical of multiracials who choose to ignore their light skin privilege, Seth explained:

One thing that's not acknowledged is the privilege that is extended to multiracial people so that they may escape the discrimination of a more clearly identifiable person of color might receive. So for example, you might receive a benefit if you are a light skinned Black versus a dark skinned Black because whites think you are more like them. So there is that privilege and the possibility of being judged by dominate norms of acceptance and beauty...there is definitely a privilege there.

Similarly, Mary explained, "Well, how you are treated is dependent on how people perceive you. For example, someone who is perceived as Black even though they are biracial will have a harder time than someone who is seen as white." Both Seth and Mary are adamant about others recognizing the privileges experienced by those with a lighter phenotype because they understands that such a recognition challenges the dominate narrative that there are not unfair advantages granted in America. Through exposing America's positive orientation towards whiteness and white/light skin, those within the multiracial movement operating out of a counter-frame seek to use their privilege to call attention to the blatant lie of America's "equal opportunity" rhetoric. In exposing the hypocrisy that is America, continuing the vain of the Civil Rights Movement, it is the hope of multiracial advocates that they can appeal to the "liberty and justice" rhetoric explicit in America's founding documents and bring about a more racially equal society. This leads to the next element of the multiracial counter-frame-- the complete rejection of colorblindness.

Rejection of Colorblindness

As mentioned in Chapter III, promoting the ideology of colorblindness to the dominant racial rhetoric was a racist response by whites to ensure their dominant social status while appearing committed to equality. This was not a new creation. It was merely

a change in the socially acceptable form of racism. Those who seek to uphold the colorblind lie maintain that success in life is primarily based on individual effort rather than race and refuse to acknowledge the sociopolitical nature of race and the different lived experiences of difference races (Korgen and O'Brien 2007). According to Bonilla-Silva (2003):

Modern racial ideology does not thrive on the ugliness of the past or on the language and tropes typical of slavery and Jim Crow. Today there is a sanitized, colorblind way of calling minorities niggers, Spics, and Chinks...Whites believe minorities have opportunities to succeed and that, if they do not, it is because they do not try hard. And if minorities dare talk about discrimination, they are rebuked with statements such as “Discrimination ended in the sixties man.”

The purpose of colorblind rhetoric is twofold. First it serves to preserve white virtue by proclaiming people of color are the sole cause of all their problems. In making this argument, whites absolve themselves of any responsibility for the chronic oppression and terrorism experienced by people of color. The white need to absolve themselves from any responsibility dates back at least to the 1600s. One of the earliest ways this was done was through religion. In 1606, King James I wrote a letter explaining the colony of Jamestown was “god-ordained” based solely upon the cultural differences and deficiencies of the “Infidels and Savages, living in those parts” (Williams 1991). In contemporary America, whites avoid responsibility via the legal system. In *Looking to the Bottom*, Matsuda (1987) explains, “Legal ideals are manipulable and law serves to *legitimate* existing maldistributions of wealth and power. Members of the dominant class continue to benefit from the wrongs of the past and the presumptions of inferiority imposed upon victims.”

The second purpose of the colorblind lie is to frame people of color as fundamentally pathological and culturally inferior to whites. As evident in the letter from King James I, whites have historically made a point to frame people of color as “barbarians, savages, and animal-like since the fifteen century” This is due to Eurocentric culture’s production of a general sense of insecurity and an incessant need to control, dominate, and be better than others” (Nunn 1997). This need to feel culturally superior was contemporary illustrated during Hurricane Katrina. According to Curry (2007):

[Katrina] brought race to the forefront of the white imagination, but no sooner than the thought appearing to the white mind, it disappeared in favor of racial stereotypes that blamed Black laziness for the poverty they suffered, Black inferiority for the ill-advised choice to stay in New Orleans during the hurricane, and Black savagery for the theodic suffering of the people. In the minds of most whites, the suffering, poverty and death of Blacks in Katrina are actually justified as the moral punishment of God.

Framing Blacks as pathological, white are able to stroke their own egos and make themselves feel superior to those they dominate and justify their continued impoverishment of communities of color. Recognizing the white supremacist nature of the colorblind lie and the immediate danger it poses for communities of color, members of the multiracial movement have been quick to reject this racist ideology.

In a conversation with Lori about the accusation that the multiracial movement advocates colorblindness, Lori argued:

Colorblind to most people means racism-blind. So no, we should not be ignoring racism. You know, part of the colorblind agenda is claiming that racism is dead so if we stop talking about race that will be the last part of getting rid of racism. Racism is not over, it’s ubiquitous.

In a later discussion about the things she dislikes about the publicity the multiracial movement receives, Lori explained:

[She hates] the way conservatives are trying to co-opt multiraciality for their colorblind agenda. I see this often when I talked to mixed folks. They say “I’m multiracial and it’s great racism’s over.” And I think they really need an education about racism. It’s ridiculous to think racism’s over, yet there is this expressed push to get multiracials to say racism’s over and we’re held up as the example of why a colorblind agenda is valid.

In both of Lori’s statements there is an explicit rejection of colorblind ideology. In proclaiming “racism is not over, it’s ubiquitous,” Lori is noting racism’s enduring legacy in America and promoting the idea that race still matters which are both key aspects of the multiracial counter-frame. Perhaps one of the best descriptions of colorblindness was offered by Jamie. While talking about the charges of colorblindness against the movement, Jamie simply stated, “Colorblindness is a defect, not something we should strive for.” Due to Jamie’s background in the visual arts, she equated racial colorblindness to optical colorblindness. In doing so, she created a powerful analogy for understanding the illogical assumption that America should strive to be a colorblind nation.

Optical colorblindness or color vision deficiency is the inability to perceive differences between some of the colors that others can easily distinguish. The colors are there containing all of their qualities, however the colorblind individual is unable to see and fully understand the complexity of each color. Therefore, optical colorblindness is a defect because it prevents the human body from fully perceiving color. Likewise, racial colorblindness has the same effect. Racial colorblindness is a professed inability to

perceive different races *and* the sociopolitical circumstances which have created a given race. These elements are clear to the race-conscious eye; however those expressing the colorblind lie profess to be unable to see them. For this reason racial colorblindness should also be understood as a defect because it prevents individuals from fully perceiving their social reality. Supporting the belief that colorblindness is a defect in the human experience is Valerie. In a conversation about whether America could be colorblind or not, Valerie explained, “Absolutely not! The very notion of colorblindness is crazy! It’s a false ideology because essentially you’re saying we don’t want to recognize something that’s there.” In Valerie’s statement, there is a clear belief that race still matters and racism has real-life consequences. This is the core of the anti-colorblindness dimension of the multiracial counter-frame.

As seen in the statements of Lori, Jamie, and Valerie, there are segments of the multiracial movement that firmly believe in the importance of recognizing race and racism. In their acknowledgement of the continued importance of race in America, the participants in this study expose the multiracial counter-frame’s clear rejection of the colorblind agenda. According to Brittany:

The definition of colorblind as I see it is keeping your head in the sand. Which isn’t that answer. Like saying I don’t see color, that’s just crap because there is a lot of good stuff to see and learn about people of different colors. The answer is not to be colorblind but to appreciate everyone and all our differences and similarities.

This is a critical component of the multiracial counter-frame because it explicitly rejects the dominant white racist narrative of colorblindness. The rejection of colorblindness is essential for any real racial movement to defeat the dominant white racist structure that

is America. Embracing the antithesis of colorblindness, race consciousness, Nathan Hare (1973) argues, “He [the Black scholar] must achieve a Black perspective of all his training and experience, so that his scholarly tools can become effective instruments for liberation.” Extending this call for race consciousness beyond scholars, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton encourage the Black masses to embrace the message of Black Power. According to Carmichael and Hamilton (1992):

Black Power is a call for Black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for Black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations. The extent to which Black Americans can and do “trace their roots” to Africa, to that extent will they be able to be more effective on the political scene.

Hare, Carmichael and Hamilton specifically state the importance of race consciousness for a real racial movement to be effective. In addition to embracing race consciousness, the multiracial counter-frame also possesses an explicit charge against whiteness in an “anti-white purity” element which I refer to as “multigenerational multiracialism.”

Multigenerational Multiracialism

Central to the dominant white racist frame is a fundamental belief in the purity and virtue of whites (Feagin 2010b). Whites have historically constructed physical barriers and passed legislation to “protect the purity” of the white race (Haney-López 2006; Harris 1993; Pascoe 2009). However, while professing a desire to maintain racial purity, whites have for over four hundred years made a general practice of viciously raping men, women, and children of color (Feagin 2006; 2010a; Neal 2010; Norde 2008; Roberts 1997). As a result of whites’ predatory sexual attacks, multiple generations of “mixed race” off children have been produced. These children were either results of

whites men raping Black women and forcing them to carry the child to term or white women raping Black men and concealing their pregnancies from their husbands. During the antebellum years, these children then went on to be enslaved either in the field or in the slave-masters' house. Throughout their lives, many of these individuals were raped just as their parents (Neal 2010). As this vicious cycle continued, the phenotype of the children resulting from whites' sexual assaults grew lighter complected until they were believed to be white. It should be noted that the sexual assaults on Black women were designed to emasculate the Black man and protect white women (Davis 1981).

Additionally, resulting from their internal colonization, segments of the Black community began to marry "lighter" Blacks in order to gain at least partial access to white society (Russel et al. 1993). This history of whites' sexual attacks on men, women, and children of color as well as the as the effects of internal colonization on the Black community are the foundation of the multiracial counter-frame's "multigenerational multiracialism" element.

According to multigenerational multiracialism, given the vicious history of white predatory sexual attacks, everyone in America, as well as in any other nation touched by Europeans, is multiracial. This is due to the accepted European cultural and social belief that rape, when used as a colonizing tool, is acceptable. (Davis 1981; Fanon 1967; Nunn 1997; Thomas 2007). This is a particularly powerful element of the multiracial counter-frame because it's a direct assault on whites' fundamental belief in their racial purity as well as recognition of whites' lack of virtue through an acknowledgement of the

rapacious acts perpetrated by whites. Supporting this belief, in a conversation about the benefits of the multiracial movement, James argued:

The multiracial movement is helping recapture that long history of multiracialism in America. Also, we have to see multiraciality as a means of connecting us not only in the U.S. We have to also reconnect with our ancestry in Africa. Those are two of the most radical and important things for people to get. That *everyone is multiracial in ancestry if you go far back we are all from Africa*. This is the real value of multiraciality. It is able to wake the nation up from a coma it's been in for so long. We are all connected and we trace back to Africa. I mean we just found out Obama is related to Dick Cheney. *The thing is getting people to see it doesn't matter what you think you are, what you look like, what you were socialized as, your ancestry links up to Africa. So get over this notion of racial purity because there is no such thing.* [Emphasis added]

While James does not explicitly mention what the “history of multiracialism” includes in this statement, his scholarly work supports understanding the “history of multiracialism” as a history of rape and sexual coercion in America. For James, the value of the multiracial project is not only identity recognition, but that it forces whites to acknowledge and confront an aspect of their predatory history which is frequently omitted. It is James’ hope that through addressing this history, true racial progress can begin to be made and racism be eliminated. Supporting James’ statement, while discussing the idea multiracialism, Sean explained:

It doesn't make you less of one thing, you're just identifying with more than one group. Once people wrap their brain around that, the rest kind of falls into line. If somebody can be in any race and you don't know who in your background was what race because everybody's multiracial then how can you be racist against somebody else because they may have the same background you do.

Again, in Sean’s statement there is a belief in multigenerational multiracialism and an explicit rejection of white racial “purity” is expressed. For those within the movement,

science holds the key explaining the multiracial history addressed by James and Sean. This belief was expressed by Michael while having a conversation about who may have a claim to multiracialism in which he stated, “I mean the scientists say we all came from Africa, so yes we all have a claim multiraciality. We are all multiracial.” In Michael’s statement there is a clear belief in science’s ability to expose the validity of multigenerational multiracialism. According to Steve Connor (2007), science editor for *The Independent*:

Studies of DNA and the physical differences between skulls show that human variation diminishes the greater the distance from Africa. This confirms the view that after originating in Africa about 200,000 years ago, anatomically modern Homo sapiens lived on the continent for about 150,000 years before beginning the long trek to Asia, Australia, Europe and finally the Americas.

Connor’s and Michael’s statements reveal the general scientific justification for multigenerational multiracialism. Geneticists and anthropologists have found all people trace back to Africa and the multiracial movement has latched onto this information and developed a very important element of its counter-frame in multigenerational multiraciality. This element not only serves to attack the notion of white racial purity but it also acknowledges the vicious sexual assaults on Black men, women, and children by whites. In doing so, the notion of multigenerational multiracialism debunks whites’ myth of their moral superiority and is perhaps the most critical component of the multiracial counter-frame because it is an explicit assault on whites’ very identity.

The Multiracial Heritage Frame

One area of particular interest for this study was an examination of the different ways individuals claiming multiraciality frame themselves. Exemplifying the multi-

conceptual tendencies of the multiracial movement, in depth analysis of the comments from my respondents presented two contrasting ways in which multiracials frame themselves. The first is something I refer to as the “unique multiracial frame.”

Individuals speaking from this frame tend to present mixed race individuals as a unique racial group with its’ own issues and interests. The second frame is what I will call the “race-conscious multiracial” frame. Those framing themselves from this perspective tend to recognize themselves as members of their constituent communities of color.

These individuals do not believe multiracials should be understood as a race unto themselves. Instead, the race-conscious multiracial frame asserts that mixed race people are members of the larger community of people of color in a white supremacist society. To explore both the unique and race-conscious frame, I will first begin with the unique multiracial frame.

The Unique Multiracial Frame

The core of the unique multiracial frame is the belief that individuals claiming multiracality should be recognized as their own unique racial group. The belief in a multiracial heritage is best expressed by Lisa. While discussing the different racial heritages of her children, Lisa stated:

I often explain to people my children have three heritages: my white heritage, their father’s Black heritage, and third is their multiracial heritage. Their multiracial heritage means they can see somebody like The Rock or Mariah Carey and say that person’s like me.

Lisa’s assumption that all mixed race people share a common heritage with Mariah Carey or The Rock exemplifies the unique multiracial frame. According to this frame, regardless of the race of their parents or phenotype, all mixed race individuals share a

common heritage. A similar belief was expressed by Michael while discussing the needs of multiracial children. According to Michael:

We need to have the needs of multiracial children understood and reached out to by schools. The biggest need is that they are simply invisible. Curriculum materials don't respond to them, the federal categories don't allow them to check who they are, teachers, counselors, and social workers have no clue how to work with them. It's simply a huge vacuum.

Again, in Michael's statement there is an implicit argument understanding multiracials as a unique racial group. In claiming "teachers, counselors, and social workers have no clue how to work with" multiracial children, Michael is asserting mixed race children are racially and culturally different from "monoracial" children. Asserting the belief that multiracials are their own unique racial group, in a conversation about those opposing the multiracial movement Jennifer explained:

Everybody you see in the media and even our president because he has never said or done anything for multiracials. He may mention his mother or father but he has never addressed the multiracial issue. *He thinks that he's African American and he's not. He's biracial, but he doesn't want to say he's biracial. There are too many African Americans that I've met in my life who think they're Black but they are really multiracial.* [Emphasis added]

In Jennifer's statement, there is a clear belief that the experience of being multiracial is reason enough to consider multiracials as a unique racial group. This is the core of the unique multiracial frame, the idea that multiracials are fundamentally different from other racial groups. However, not all advocates of multiracialism expressed this frame. Contrasting the unique multiracial frame is the race conscious multiracial frame.

The Race Conscious Multiracial Frame

The nucleus of the race conscious multiracial frame is based in the sociopolitical nature of race. Understanding these conditions has led those expressing this frame to view themselves as part of the larger community of color which is oppressed by whites. This frame is best expressed in a statement by Lori. In a conversation about evaluating the possibility of a multiracial census classification, Lori explained:

There are a lot of different multiracial possibilities. After the 2000 Census, it was reported that there were 57 different racial combinations. So one way to look at it is to say all 57 combinations have unique experiences. Another way is to say we are people of color and experience disadvantage in a white supremacist society.

Lori makes a very important point in her statement in that she argues there is no one common multiracial heritage as argued by those operating out of the unique multiracial frame. According to Lori, every racial combination has different experiences. However, despite these differences, those claiming multiraciality are still people of color in a white supremacist society. The recognition of this reality sets the race conscious frame aside from the unique multiracial frame. Supporting this belief was Daniel. In a discussion about why his organization was so strongly opposed to Ward Connerly and his conservative colorblind initiatives, Daniel explained:

Another reason was that we wanted to be in a form of solidarity with other communities of color because we are people of color. Part of our goal was showing communities of color that not only are we people of color but we were also members of their communities and that we had a common cause, defeating white supremacy... Certainly there are those like Charles Byrd who clearly express that they don't want to be part of the communities of color and these guys certainly need to be criticized but it's disingenuous to say that's representative of the multiracial movement.

In Daniel's statement there is a clear desire to reaffirm himself and his organization as members of a larger community of color. For Daniel one means of doing so is attacking racial oppression and the white supremacist motives of Charles Byrd and conservatives. According to Daniel, the acts of those like Byrd are not representative of the entire multiracial movement. Jamie supports this statement. While discussing the importance of the MATA decision and the irrationality of a multiracial classification, Jamie stated:

I think most of us are still deeply rooted in our communities. I'm very much a part of Asian America, but I also participate in the Jewish community. I think MATA allows us to do this. It doesn't make us traitors and take away from communities. It allows us to be rooted in both. As for a standalone multiracial category, it really doesn't mean anything. I mean, everybody could say they are mixed race or multiracial. It's just incredibly too big. It doesn't help with funding anything and it doesn't help with my identity construction. It just don't have any meaning.

Considering Jamie's expression of the race-conscious multiracial frame, most multiracials are deeply rooted in their communities of color and recognize themselves as such. Similar to Lori, Jamie makes a point to explain that a multiracial classification is really meaningless because everybody could claim multiraciality. Based on this belief, there is not one common multiracial heritage if people who are "monoracial" Blacks, whites, Latinos, and Asians are equally multiracial. Therefore, people claiming multiraciality according to the race-conscious frame are not a racial group of their own with their own heritage. Instead, multiracials are members of a larger community of color seeking liberation from white domination.

Summary

Although those within the movement do at times operate out of a traditional white racist frame, this chapter has outlined the key elements of the other side of the multiracial movement--its counter-frame. The first major element identified was an acknowledgement of the continued importance of being “light-skinned.” In conversations with multiracial advocates, they frequently mentioned the privileges they experience for being closer to the acceptable white phenotype. Through acknowledging the persistence of white/light skin privilege, the multiracial counter-frame debunks the colorblind lie that everyone is equal and no group experiences racial advantages. Continuing in this vein, the second identified element of the multiracial counter-frame is a complete rejection of the colorblind agenda. My respondents argued both explicitly and implicitly, that the notion of colorblindness is fundamentally a white supremacist belief system which ignore the sociopolitical nature of race and is a societal “defect.” The third element of the multiracial counter-frame discussed in this chapter was something I refer to as “multigenerational multiracialism.” According to this belief, everyone is multiracial. This notion is supported by both scientists and whites’ predatory history of sexually exploiting Black men, women, and children. This is an important element of the multiracial counter-frame because it both debunks whites’ racist belief in racial purity and rejects notions of white virtue by acknowledging whites’ predatory history, both of which are at the core of the dominate white racist frame. Additionally, the different ways multiracials frame themselves which I call the “multiracial heritage” frame was identified. This frame is comprised of two conflicting sub-frames. Those

operating out of the “unique multiracial” frame believe that mixed race individuals possess a common multiracial history. Contrasting this frame is the “race-conscious” frame. According to this frame, there is no multiracial heritage. Instead, those claiming multiraciality are members of the larger community of color.

Comparing and contrasting the frames expressed by multiracial advocates reveals the multi-conceptual nature of the multiracial movement. As this study has shown thus far, it is common for those within the movement to expressed different frames from one moment to the next. While arguing from an explicit anti-racist counter-frame, frequently advocates of multiracialism articulate the soft, or sometimes hard, racial framing of the traditional white racist frame. Therefore, it’s inaccurate to characterize the multiracial movement as an exclusively anti-racist or white supremacist movement. It is neither and it is both. This complexity makes understanding multi-framers and movements comprised of such individuals a difficult task because they can’t be easily categorized. However, to best understand multi-framers such as those in the multiracial movement, one must engage in a practical discussion about the significance and complications the frames utilized present. In terms of the multiracial movement, perhaps the most practical discussion to have is that of the 1997 OMB “MATA” decision and how the movement’s different frames resulted in a change to the Census Bureau’s racial classification scheme.

CHAPTER VI

INTEREST CONVERGENCE AND THE MATA DECISION

As discussed in the last two chapters, the multiracial movement is comprised of a large group of individuals operating out of different and often contrasting racial frames. It is very common for those in the movement to articulate opposing frameworks within the same hour or even the same conversation. In order to see what the use of these various frames means in real-life situations, it's critical to have a practical analysis of how the frames are used. Perhaps the best example of the real-life utilization the frames discussed in the last two chapters is the political activity of the multiracial movement leading up to the OMB's MATA decision in 1997. To analyze the MATA decision, I will utilize critical race theory, specifically Derrick Bell's concepts of racial realism and interest convergence.

Over the last 20 years, critical race theory (CRT) has attracted the interest of a growing number of race scholars (Curry 2008). One of the fundamental elements of CRT is Derrick Bell's interest convergence principle (Aleman and Aleman 2010; Delgado and Stefancic 2000; 2001; Milner 2008; Muhammad 2009). According to the interest convergence principle, whites will only accommodate Blacks' desire for racial justice when they have something to gain (Bell 1980; 1992; 2004). Though Bell developed interest convergence by examining whites' interaction with the Black community, other scholars have recently provided proof that the interest convergence principle equally applies to whites' treatment of other peoples of color (Aleman and Aleman 2010; Castagno and Lee 2007; Milner 2008; Muhammad 2009; Tillery 2009).

Continuing in this tradition, this chapter seeks to apply Bell's interest convergence principle to the multiracial movement and the MATA decision.

Racial Realism and Interest Convergence

Growing frustrated with the increased retrenchment of Civil Rights victories, Derrick Bell expressed a new and controversial idea in the *Connecticut Law Review* in 1992. This new idea was the concept of racial realism. Bell (1992) conceptualized racial realism as a philosophy which required Blacks to acknowledge the permanence of their subordinate status in America. Racial realism's argument for the permanence of racism is rooted in the historical fact that the culture and normal functioning of American institutions have continued to reproduce racial hierarchy and white supremacy--the white power structure of formal and informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms of differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties--even after reform laws declared people of color equal to whites (Mills 1997; Tillery 2009). As Bell (1992) argues, "Even those Herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary "peaks of progress," short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance."

Bell's (1992) belief that "racial equality is, in fact, not a realistic goal," has aroused the anger of whites and certain people of color, progressive or not, because of its nonnegotiable, racial realist argument on social reality (Aleman and Aleman 2010). However, for Bell, racial realism is not a pessimistic philosophy. Instead, racial realism grants Blacks the ability to envision liberation strategies, outside of the civil rights

incrementalist model, that have more promise to alleviate the injustices that continue to exist (Aleman and Aleman 2010; Bell 1992; Tillery 2009). As Bell (1992) argues:

It is time Blacks concede that a commitment to racial equality merely perpetuates our disempowerment. Rather, we need a mechanism to make life bearable in a society where Blacks are a permanent, subordinate class. Our empowerment lies in recognizing that racial realism may open the gateway to attaining a more meaningful status.

While critics argue Bell's philosophy is pessimistic, an acceptance of racial realism enables people of color to better understand and respond to the recurrent aspects of their subordinate status for it enables them to "think and plan within a context of reality rather than idealism" (Bell 1992). "Through accepting the permanence of racism, Blacks can avoid despair and free themselves to imagine and implement racial strategies that can cause fulfillment and liberation" (Aleman and Aleman 2010; Bell 1992; 2004).

Bell's philosophy of racial realism is critical to the discussion of the multiracial movement and the MATA decision because it provides a theoretical frame for understanding the decision. Though segments of the multiracial movement, those using the unique multiracial frame, profess to be different from "monoracial" groups, they are still not white and therefore belong to the same subordinate status as their respective communities of color. This is particularly important because it raises serious questions about the importance of the multiracial project. To support the applicability of racial realism to the multiracial population, Bell's (1980) interest convergence principle will be utilized.

Bell first presented the interest convergence principle in *Brown vs. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma*. According to Bell (1980), the interest

convergence principle asserts “the interests of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites.” “There is evidence in the past,” Bell (1976) argues, “and indications in the present that the drive of whites to satisfy and justify feelings of racial superiority will result in policies, private and public, that have the effect of retaining dominance over nonwhites for many generations to come.” To illustrate his idea, Bell (2004) developed a sardonic formula to express this relationship:

Justice for Blacks vs. Racism= Racism
 Racism vs. Obvious perceptions for white self-interest= Justice for Blacks

According to Bell’s model, whenever Blacks’ pleas for justice confront America’s white supremacist structure, Blacks’ always lose. However, when the racist structure confronts whites’ interests, what appears to be justice for Blacks is produced. In other words, the interest convergence principle proposes that change benefitting Blacks, or people of color in general, will only occur when those interests also benefit whites (Aleman and Aleman 2010; Castagno and Lee 2007; Harper 2009; Muhammad 2009; Tillery 2009). This concept is fundamental to Bell’s racial realism philosophy because it affirms the reality that whites don’t act on the behalf of people of color out of an altruistic commitment to justice or some form of morality. Instead, whites only approve racial remedies that appeal to their egoistic agendas (Harper 2009).

As Bell (1980) argues, “Racial remedies are manifestations of unspoken judicial conclusions that the remedies, if granted, will secure, advance, or at least not harm the societal interests deemed important by middle and upper-class whites.” Simply put, elite whites will never support civil rights policies that appear to threaten their superior social

status (Castagno and Lee 2007). Therefore, when the interests of Blacks are in opposition to or at odds with whites, it will be impossible to expose racism and to pursue racial equality and social justice (Milner 2008). This phenomena is due to a disjuncture between the normative social convention of racial equality and positivistic reality (Bell 1980).

While it may be socially “right and proper” to espouse racial equality, an objective evaluation of social, political, and economic interactions suggests revealed preferences to the contrary (Muhammad 2009). For this reason, Bell (2004) argues, “We cannot ignore and should learn from and try to recognize situations when there is a convergence of interests.” By recognizing these situations, people of color may begin to accept their subordinate status in America and stop making futile appeals to whites’ rhetoric of “humanity” and “morality” since these two notions have nothing to do with social change.

Utilizing Bell’s interest convergence principle will allow for an alternative narrative for the MATA decision. An understanding of the way white interests interact with those of the “multiracial” population will allow for not only a deeper understanding of the MATA decision, but also the role of whites and the legal system as they relate to social change. This is a critical conversation because it will affect the ways in which the oppressed seek liberation. If whites are recognized as amoral, then futile appeals made in the name of “morality” and “humanity” can be disregarded and real options for liberation can be considered.

From a critical race perspective, Bell's concepts of racial realism and interest convergence allow for an understanding of the MATA decision based in reality rather than idealism. In rejecting this idealist frame, the realist approach enables a deeper discussion of the MATA decision which examines the motivations of the actors and what these motivations mean for notions of racial "progress." Through recognizing the motivations for the MATA decision, people of color may begin to properly discuss the multiracial movement and what this movement means for those pursuing liberation from whites' oppressive system.

Whites' Interest in MATA and the Frames of the Multiracial Movement

In the 1990s, when advocates of a multiracial category first gained a national voice, whites were beginning to express a fear of becoming "a new minority group" (Daniel 2002; Hernandez 2003; Spencer 1999; 2003). This fear was solidified in white America on November 18, 1993, when *Time Magazine* published an article entitled "The New Face of America: How Immigrants are Shaping the World's First Multicultural Society." In the article, the editor argued:

Demographers are predicting that the U.S. before long will have to redefine just who its minorities are... Even more startling, sometime during the second half of the 21st century the descendants of white Europeans, the arbiters of the core national culture for most of its existence, are likely to slip into minority status.²¹

This article sent large waves of what Feagin (2010a; 2010b) refers to as "racialized fear" through the white community. The white reaction to this article was based on the white

²¹ *Time* article achieves December, 4, 2010
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,979725,00.html#ixzz17B48L4z6>

fear of losing social power to people of color, Latino/as in particular (Daniel and Castaneda-Liles 2006).

This concern with the “browning of America” encouraged whites to openly express both the soft racial framing of colorblindness through resentment of race conscious policies as reverse discrimination and the hard framing of characterizing immigrants as “parasites leeching off good whites Americans” (Chavez 2008; Roediger 2008). In other words, whites feared policies such as affirmative action would take away the advantages of whiteness and give people of color an underserved advantage (Daniel 2002). However, due to the political climate, whites could not wage a full assault on people of color due to the political suicide of being perceived as racist. They had to find a community of color which could lead the assault on race consciousness. Whites found the perfect opportunity to enact their racist agenda in the seemingly progressive rhetoric of the multiracial movement.

Within the movement, multiracial activists frequently argue since the significant differences among racial groups are socially constructed artifacts, they must be done away with (Thornton 1992). While discussing the beliefs of the multiracial movement, Sean stated:

The first and most basic is that there is no biological or genetic basis for race. It’s not something you’re born into, it’s something we construct. *If it’s something we humans made up, then it’s something we can unmake.* We can change it. We can move between races, be part of multiple races, or have no race at all. [Emphasis added]

Therefore, as seen in Sean’s statement, activists within the movement appear to implicitly wish to use the “multiracial” category as a mechanism for moving toward a

colorblind society (Hernandez 2003). However, it should be made clear that not all advocates of multiracialism were champions of colorblindness. According to Jamie:

We don't pay enough attention to race. The conversations we have about race are incredibly simplified. We always fall back on the Black/white binary and don't ask serious questions about race. We are never intellectual about it. It's not an in depth conversation.

Jamie was not alone in this sentiment. Supporting the desire for the multiracial movement to develop a sense of race consciousness, Natalie, who is no longer a part of the multiracial movement, argued:

They [the multiracial movement] need to become more aware of the politics of race in the United States rooted in *equality concerns not cultural identity concerns*. Cultural identity is fluid and highly personal, but racial justice is a need for the collective to embrace with an understanding of how non-whites are viewed. Ignoring race does not make inequality go away. In fact, it just makes it harder to address [Emphasis added]

Despite Natalie and Jamie contesting colorblindness, the desire to move in that direction as expressed by Sean was the dominant voice of the multiracial movement during the apex of its political activity. This is a critical point because the use of the traditional white racist frame by multiracial advocates is the very thing that attracted elite whites to the multiracial movement. Through finding a group of color to champion the white racist agenda of colorblindness, elite whites were able to absolve themselves from being perceived as racist thanks to a group of color leading the assault on race consciousness.

Supporting this colorblind agenda, a common argument amongst the multiracial movement is that race has become too fluid to monitor, and that the creation of a multiracial category will slowly efface all distinctions and, ultimately, eliminate race and

racism (Davis 2007). In a conversation about the importance of the multiracial movement, Brittany supported this claim stating:

It [the multiracial movement] is having a positive effect on race in America because it forces us to have a dialog and take into account the constant emergence of difference mixes. It's a very broadening and freeing movement. I believe it fosters democracy and collaboration. It shows race is very open and fluid...not rigid. If we work hard, we can start to work our way away from it [race].

It is this implicit desire to efface all racial distinctions which drew whites to support the multiracial movement. Elite whites knew race would never be done away because they had a vested interest in maintaining racial distinctions and the power to reinforce the racial hierarchy. However, they were able to use the colorblind frame articulated by the multiracial movement to appear as though they were actually more racially progressive than traditional racial progressives. Further expressing the traditional white racist frame soft frame of colorblindness, the multiracial movement frequently posits that multiracial persons are a unifying force on the theory that “multiracial” persons as a group are the embodiment of America’s best chance to abolish the social construction of race” (Hernandez 2003). Supporting this desire to abolish race, Jennifer explained, “race is still kind of important you know, but we’re trying to move past it...to more important things.” In this statement Jennifer, a key player in the multiracial movement, is clearly operating out of the racist lie of colorblindness through advocating the need to “abolish the social construction of race.” Again, while advocates of multiracialism like Jennifer were championing the white lie of colorblindness, there was a small minority of the movement represented by Jessica who argues:

On one hand we would like to not view ourselves based solely on it [race], but we have to recognize that racism and white supremacy still exist. In the United States, with our history, race is a tremendous issue and we can't get away from it.

This historically contextualization of race expressed by Jessica is the strength of the counter-frame of the multiracial movement. However, this counter-frame was not the dominant voice of the multiracial movement during the census debate. During the political debate about the changes to be made to the census, the multiracial movement largely operated out of the traditional white racist frame and stressed colorblindness.

In his explicit assault on race consciousness, Charles Michael Byrd, editor of *Interracial Voice*, stated, "The Multiracial Movement is a jihad against race consciousness" (Daniel and Castaneda-Liles 2006). Statements such as that of Byrd present the general view of a segment the multiracial movement that any racial classification diminishes the humanity of individuals (Hernandez 2003). Furthermore, during the census debates, proponents of multiracialism, particularly APUN, even argued advocates of race consciousness--those believing it's important to recognize race--are trapped within a system which reinforces their own oppression (Spencer 1999). It was this discourse out of the white racial (ist) frame stressing colorblindness and the denial of the sociopolitical implications of race which attracted elite whites.

Elite whites made a clear strategic link between the rhetoric of colorblindness and the multiracial movement, using the latter and its expressed frames as an indication of racial justice while denying continued inequalities and undercutting the tools necessary to pursue racial justice (Daniel and Castaneda-Liles 2006). Spearheading the white endorsement of multiracialism was Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House and

architect of the 1994 neoconservative manifesto *Contract with America* (Daniel 2002; Daniel and Castaneda-Liles 2006; Hernandez 2003; Rockquemore et al. 2008; Sexton 2008; Spencer 1999; 2003; Williams 2003; 2008). Given Gingrich's voting record of not once supporting civil rights legislation (Williams 2008), why was he such a strong advocate of multiracialism?

Gingrich's support for multiracialism can best be explained by applying Bell's interest convergence principle. Elite whites such as Gingrich did not altruistically support multiracialism. Instead, what motivated Gingrich was the negative affect such a movement could have on the system of civil rights compliance monitoring (Spencer 2003). Simply put, whites supported the multiracial movement because the creation of a multiracial census category would limit the effectiveness of civil rights compliance monitoring (Spencer 1999). However, it would have been political suicide to announce such an agenda. Therefore, whites endorsed multiracialism to undermine civil rights achievements while seeming racially progressive (Williams 2008). It was the hope of elite whites that a multiracial classification would "help dilute race consciousness and thus serve the civic purpose of undermining America's obsession with race and ending what conservatives refer to as the "racial spoil system"" (Daniel 2002). Gingrich articulated this sentiment on June 18, 1997, when he announced his ten steps for "building a better America," which included "adding a multiracial category on the census, and "doing away with affirmative action" (Spencer 2003).

Additionally, elite whites were able to use the multiracial movement's rhetoric of increased intermarriage and the growing number of multiracial identified people as a

reaffirmation of colorblind ideology and the realization of an egalitarian racial order (Daniel and Castaneda-Liles 2006). Gingrich supported this argument in a 1997 hearing in which he said:

We should stop forcing Americans into inaccurate categories aimed at building divisive subgroups and allow them the option of selecting the category “multiracial,” which I believe will be an important step toward transcending racial division and reflecting the melting pot that is America²²

Furthermore, earlier that same year Gingrich stated:

I believe we can address this countries racial divide by adding a multiracial category on all federal forms and the United States Census while simultaneously phasing out the outdated, divisive and rigid classification of Americans and Ultimately, our goal is to have one classification, American²³

This message of colorblindness and equality championed by Gingrich was nothing more than a rhetorical sleight of hand enabling elite whites to exploit the current racial ecology to advance their pro-white, anti-Black agenda designed to maintain racial subordination of people of color (Daniel 2002). Thus, whites support for the recognition of multiracialism can be understood as stemming from their desire to defuse policies aimed for racial justice and to perpetuate white supremacy through the colorblind frame and its narrative expressed by the multiracial movement (Hernandez 2003).

²² U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee on Government Management, Information, and Technology, Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, Hearing on Federal Measures of Race and Ethnicity and the Implications for the 2000 Census, testimony by Newt Gingrich, July 25, 1997, 105 Cong., 1st sess., April 23, May 22, and July 25, 1997, 662.

²³ The first quote was taken from a personal correspondence written by Newt Gingrich to the director of the Office of Management and Budget, July 1, 1997. The second quote was found in Jerelyn Eddings, “Counting a “New” Type of American: The Dicey Politics of Creating a “Multiracial” Category on the Census,” U.S. News and World Report, July 7, 1997, A1.

A Critical Reflection on the MATA Decision

Reflecting on the MATA decision, it would appear as though whites gained support for their racist agenda by claiming that “unfair preferences” had been given to racial minorities, preying on the fears of poor whites who felt themselves to be somewhat disenfranchised (Daniel and Castaneda-Liles 2006). Ultimately, these attitudes were the driving force behind rolling back many of the civil rights gains made in the 1960s and 1970s and have provided a platform for white supremacists to appropriate the language of egalitarianism for their own political agendas (Daniel 2002; Hernandez 2003; Spencer 2003). Furthermore, by framing affirmative action and other policies as “reverse discrimination,” whites have successfully positioned themselves as the harbingers of an egalitarian society based on individual, as opposed to group rights (Daniel and Castaneda-Liles 2006). That being said, clearly whites support of the multiracial movement was not out of their desire to make sure Americans were accurately identified on federal forms. By using the racial transcendence/colorblind frame and its rhetoric as expressed by the multiracial movement, whites were able to effectively overturn race conscious policies such as affirmative action and promote their white supremacist agenda while appearing to be racially progressive.

In the MATA decision, as in other racially “progressive” moments in American history, whites did not have the welfare of people of color in mind. The MATA decision was about nothing more than whites’ attempting to preserve their own dominant position in the social hierarchy. From Bell’s racial realist perspective, those within the multiracial movement were nothing more than “incidental beneficiaries.” Bell (2004) defines

incidental beneficiaries as a group of people who benefit from the contractual arrangements made by whites though they are not the parties in the contractual negotiations. Therefore, it should be understood that the contractual arrangements which resulted in MATA did not alter the overarching racial contract centered on white domination of people of color. For this reason, the MATA decision should be seen as nothing more than whites' manipulation of a group of color.

Utilizing Bell's concepts of interest convergence and racial realism, the MATA decision appears to be not about racial "progress" or allowing children to identify with both of their parents on the census. Instead, from a critical race perspective, the MATA decision can be understood as the product of whites' colorblind agenda and the use of the traditional white racist frame by the multiracial movement. Faced with demographic shifts in American society, whites' became fearful of losing their privileged status to people of color. In order to prevent this from happening, whites latched onto the rhetoric of the multiracial movement and their political push for a "multiracial" census category. The rhetoric of colorblindness, social constructionism, and increased intermarriage expressed by the multiracial movement was conducive to whites' agenda of maintaining a racially oppressive social system centered on white dominance. Through the multiracial movement arguing race is socially constructed and therefore is meaningless, whites were able to attack race conscious policies designed for racial justice while appearing racially progressive. For this reason, the MATA decision should be understood as a white supremacist decision and a lesson to be learned by the multiracial movement.

Summary

Reflecting upon the political activity leading up to the MATA decision, it appears as though during the debate about possible changes to be made to the census, the multiracial counter-frame was virtually nonexistent. However, the expressions of the traditional white racist frame was able to gain support for the multiracial movement by whites that in turn provided the movement with the empty symbol of MATA which does absolutely nothing to threaten white supremacy or the racist structure of America. Perhaps if the multiracial counter-frame had been openly expressed during the debates leading up to the MATA decision the multiracial movement could have potentially had a major effect on at least the racial discourse in America if not more. Instead, generally the movement operated out of the traditional white racist frame and received the meaningless symbol of MATA. It is very likely that the reason a counter-frame never emerged in the height of political activity for the movement was because the movement needed any support it get in light of its large amount of opposition. Nonetheless, by aligning themselves with conservatives and their colorblind agenda, those in the multiracial movement turned their backs on the very communities they are a part of and will likely need as allies in the future if the movement ever decides to assert a strong counter-frame on the national stage.

Throughout this study the multiracial movement has been presented as a movement comprised of multi-framers. However, an analysis of debates leading up to the MATA decision presents a different story. During the peak of political activity for the multiracial movement, the movement appeared to be a monolith expressing only the

traditional white racist frame. However, perhaps the decade that has passed since the MATA decision allowed for the multiracial counter-frame discussed in this study to develop. As it stands now, the multiracial movement does operate out of the traditional white racist frame. However, while expressing this traditional racist framing, advocates of multiracialism simultaneously assert a multiracial counter-frame. Therefore, a decade after the MATA decision, the movement does not appear to be monolithic. It is complex and deserves to have its multi-conceptual nature recognized.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

During the 1990s, a group of mixed race individuals and interracial couples presented themselves on the American national stage as a “multiracial movement.” Within this movement, the advocates of multiracialism organized themselves into various organizations with different agendas. For some within the movement, their primary motivations are political and therefore established political advocacy organization focused on gain recognition of multiraciality by the government. Contrasting the political activists of the movement are those concerned more with creating a support system for multiracials than government recognition. Though the movement is separated into political and social organizations, this study has identified the overarching racial frames amongst advocates of multiracialism.

The first major frame identified is the traditional white racist frame. The central value of this frame is whiteness. This frame commonly manifests in the forms of hard and soft framing, both of which were confirmed amongst the multiracial movement. The hard frame of biological race is frequently used by advocates of multiracialism stressing the uniqueness of the “multiracial gene pool.” This argument is problematic because it rests on the assumption that there are “pure” races which has history been used by whites to create racial hierarchies with themselves positioned at the top. In addition to the hard framing of biological race, multiracial advocates frequently utilized the soft racist framing of the colorblind lie.

Though considered a form of “soft” framing, colorblindness is equally centered on white supremacy and domination of people of color. The main lies of colorblindness is that race doesn’t matter and all people are on an equal plane in America. In depth analysis of the responses from the participants of the study, revealed a definite use of the colorblind frame. Within the multiracial movement, there are large segments which bastardize social constructionism to say race doesn’t matter because it’s a social construct. However, the fundamental flaw in such an argument is that it completely ignores the sociopolitical nature of race and the real-life consequences it has on people of color. Maintaining their utilization of the traditional white racist frame, advocates of multiracialism also tend to frame racism as a problem within an individual. Again, just as with the colorblind lie, this framing of race ignores the systemic nature of racial oppression. However, the central argument of this study has been the multiracial movement is not a monolith and in order to discuss the movement in this way it is critical to recognize the counter-frame existent among multiracial advocates.

Contrasting the expressions of the traditional white racist frame, within the multiracial movement is the multiracial counter-frame. Counter-frames have historically been very important amongst the oppressed as a means for fighting back against white domination. Fighting back against whites, advocates of multiracialism have developed a counter-frame exposing the hypocrisies of whites’ many lies. One of the important elements of the multiracial counter-frame is the argument that race still matters. Multiracials support this argument through analyzing the many privileges they experience for being “closer to whiteness.” Though exposing this reality, advocates of

multiracialism expose the persistence of whiteness being the most valued attribute one can possess in American society. In doing so, this counter-frame is a direct assault on the white lie of colorblindness. In addition to attacking the colorblind lie, the multiracial counter-frame presents an explicit indictment of whites' very identity through what I refer to as "multigenerational multiracialism."

According to multigenerational multiracialism, everyone is multiracial. This simple concept presents a major threat to whites' identity since their existence is centered on their fictitious notion of white racial purity. Once it's revealed that everyone is multiracial, the entire white myth of racial purity is debunked. Furthermore, in order to support their claim, multiracials use history and science to support the idea of multigenerational multiracialism. Though exposing the centuries of vicious rape against men, women, and children of color which created the various phenotypes amongst the oppressed, multiracials further challenge whites' identities which rest on the assumption of whites as the embodiment of virtue and morality. By revealing whites as sexual predators, the multiracial counter-frame exposes the myth of white virtue to be a complete lie. This assault on whites' very identity is perhaps the most important aspect of the counter-frame of multiracial advocates. In light of the counter-frame expressed by the multiracial movement, it's only appropriate to discuss the movement as a multi-conceptual movement possessing both the traditional white racist frame as well as a counter-frame.

Traditionally, research on the multiracial movement has cast the multiracial advocacy as a monolithic movement. However, this study has shown the multiracial

movement to be more complex. While operating out a very racist framing arguing for understanding as a biological phenomenon, the multiracial movement will also argue from a counter-frame that whiteness is still the most valued possession one may hold in America and therefore race still matters. These contrasting arguments may be presented in the same day or even the same conversation. The multiracial movement is not a monolith. It's not solely white supremacist movement or counter-movement. It's both. Just as there are two sides to a coin, there are two sides, two frames, to the multiracial movement, a movement of multi-framers. A critical analysis of the MATA decision grants insight into this multi-conceptual nature.

Reviewing the MATA decision, it appears as though the dominant voice of the multiracial movement during the census debate was almost exclusively out of the traditional white racist frame. Frequently, advocates of multiracialism championed colorblindness and post-racialism as justification for creating a multiracial census classification. However, while the majority of the movement was stressing the colorblind lie, a minority within the movement was expressing counter-frame. Central to this counter-frame was the idea that race is still very important in America and is something that must not be ignored. Additionally, those asserting a counter-frame also expressed a belief that cultural identity recognition for multiracials does not outweigh the interest of all people of color in gaining liberation from a white supremacist society. Despite the assertion of a very critical counter-frame, the dominant voice of the multiracial movement during the census debate was almost solely an expression of the white racist frame. This use of white racist rhetoric was then co-opted by conservatives to wage an

assault of race consciousness and communities of color. The result of the converging interests of multiracials and elite whites was the MATA decision, an empty symbol for multiracials but a strong tool for whites' colorblind agenda.

Reflecting on this discussion of the multiracial movement, it is only appropriate to characterize the movement as one comprised of multi-framers. There were elements of the traditional white racist frame as well as assertions of a counter-frame present in my interviews with advocates of multiracialism. The degree to which one expresses a given frame may change within the same day or even the same conversation. However, both frames are active within the individual. For as Feagin (2009) argues, "most people carry several perspectival frames applicable to a particular situation in their heads at the same time." Therefore, those within the multiracial movement exemplify what it means to be a multi-framer. They carry multiple, often opposing, racial frames in their heads and express all of these frames in varying degrees.

This study has successfully identified both the dominant white racist frame and a counter-frame in the multiracial movement. Though expressed in varying degrees, both frames, as well as the respective subframes, operate among multiracial advocates. Therefore, this study serves to extend Feagin's current conception of racial framing to include individuals claiming multiraciality. In doing so, Feagin's theories of the white racial frame and counter-framing are granted more explanatory power. Furthermore, in identifying the multi-conceptual nature of the multiracial movement, this study serves to broaden the current body of scholarly work on multiracial advocacy.

The current literature on the multiracial movement tends to depict the movement as a monolith. It is either described as a white supremacist movement or a civil rights movement similar to that of the 1960s. However, in light of this study, it is revealed that the multiracial movement has characteristics of both a white supremacist *and* a civil rights movement. Therefore, this study serves to expose the complexity of the multiracial movement which is lacking in the current literature. Exposing the multidimensionality of the multiracial movement, a movement comprised of multi-framers, this study serves to present scholars with a new way of understanding multiracial advocacy. Only through recognizing the multi-conceptual nature of the multiracial movement may race scholars begin to appropriately discuss the movement and what it means in the continued struggle for racial justice.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

This interview will consist of three parts. The first part will about the Multiracial Movement, the second will cover general issues of race in America, and the third will cover general demographic information.

Part 1: The Multiracial Movement

In this part of the interview, you will be asked to discuss the Multiracial Movement. The Multiracial Movement has been broadly defined as the emergence of community organizations, campus groups, magazines and newsletters, academic research and writing, university courses, and political activism created by mixed-race individuals and members of interracial families to voice their own experiences, opinions, issues and interests (Nakashima 1996).

Section A: Personal Involvement

What is your role in the Multiracial Movement?

Can you tell me more about that?

How long have you been a part of the Multiracial Movement?

What made you decide to join the movement?

Can you tell me about that?

Do you belong to any multiracial activist organizations?

Which organizations?

What drew you to this organization?

Does belonging to this organization have any benefits?

What are they?

Will you explain these to me?

What would you like to see the Multiracial Movement achieve?

Why is that important to you?

Can you explain that more?

Vignette: A man's story of becoming an activist.

"I've never been one to cause trouble. You see, I became an activist because I was tired of being forced to erase my mother; she's white, from life. At least that's how I feel when I check Black on forms. It's like they want me to forget half of who I am. I did that my whole life but I've had enough. I won't remove my mother, the woman who raised me, from my life. I can't sit on the side line and watch other Biracial American be

forced into the same situation. That's why I became active. I want to change things. I don't want my kids, to be faced with the same problem. I mean since my fiancé is white my kids will have a white mother and I don't want them to feel they have to forget about her and their white ancestry."

Can you relate to this man?

How so?

Can you explain more?

Have any of your friends or relative said anything like this?

What did they say?

Why do you think they said that?

Could you explain that more?

Have you heard anyone in the movement say anything like this?

What did they say?

Why do you think they said that?

Could you explain that more?

Do you feel this man is the typical person in the Multiracial Movement?

Why do say that?

Can you explain?

Section B: Multiracial Politics

Do you believe the "MATA" decision was a victory?

Why do you believe this?

Can you explain?

Do you believe a "Multiracial" category would better classify Multiracials?

Why do believe this?

Can you explain?

Do you believe Multiracial Americans should be understood as a unique racial group?

What makes them unique?

Can you explain?

Do you believe Multiracials are discriminated against simply because they are multiracial?

Why do you believe this?

Can you explain?

Do you believe the Multiracial Movement has had/can have an effect on American race relations?

Why do you believe this?
Can you explain?

Why do you believe are the opponents of the Multiracial Movement?
Why do you believe this?
Can you explain?

Part 2: Racial Views

In this section of the interview, you will be asked to answer questions about race in America.

Do you feel America is post-racial?
Why?
Can you explain that more?

Do you feel America pays too much attention to race?
Why do you feel this way?
Can you explain this more?

What do you feel is the best way to address racial discrimination?
Why do you believe that?
Can you explain more?

Do you believe being colorblind should be the goal of every American?
Why do you believe this?
Can you explain this more?

Part 3: Demographics:

Sex:

- A) Male
- B) Female

Age:

- A) 18-29
- B) 30-39
- C) 40-49
- D) 50 +

Racial Group:

- A) Multiracial
- B) African American
- C) Asian American

- D) Hispanic American
- E) White
- F) Other _____

Education:

- A) High School
- B) Some College
- C) Two-Year Degree
- D) Bachelors Degree
- E) Grad/Professional

Occupation:

VITA

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EDUCATION

2005-2008 B.A. in Sociology, Midwestern State University
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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Racial and Ethnic Relations, Critical Race Theory, Race and Education, Anti-Colonial Theory

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY

Presenter: "The Multiracial Movement: A New Counter-Frame?" Southwestern Social Science Association Conference. Las Vegas, Nevada. March 2011

Presenter: "Let's Get Real: A Racial Realist Critique of Biracial Identity" Association of Black Sociologists Annual Conference. Atlanta, Georgia. August 2010

Presenter: "AIDS Telling: The Disclosure and Assessment Factors Related to Delivery of Bad News." Southwestern Social Science Association Conference. Houston, Texas. March 2010 (with Beverly L. Stiles, Emily E. LaBeff, and Robert E. Clark)

Presenter: "AIDS Telling: The Delivery of Bad News." World Association of Sexual Health Conference. Göteborg, Sweden. June 2009 (with Beverly L. Stiles, Emily E. LaBeff, and Robert E. Clark)

Presenter: "Noncompliance as Stigma Management in People Living with HIV/AIDS." Southwestern Social Science Association Conference. Denver, Colorado. April 2009

Presenter: "The Young African American Male: Prison vs. Education." Southwestern Social Science Association Conference. Las Vegas, Nevada. March 2008